MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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by Brett Halliday

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by Stewart Street
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by Masters
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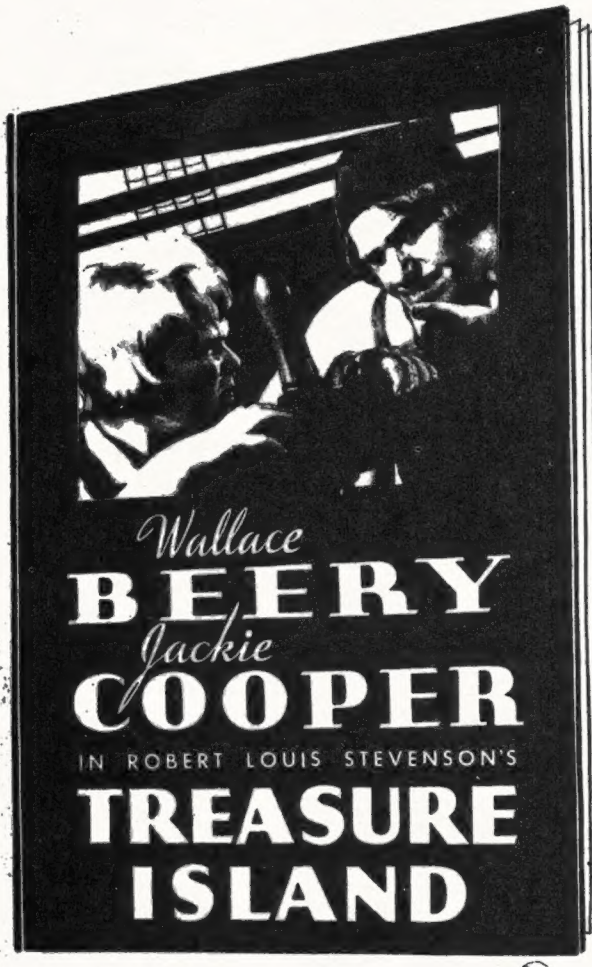

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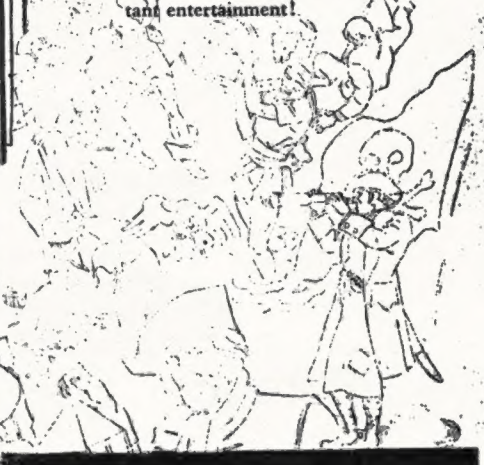

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JACKIE COOPER *as Jim Hawkins*
LIONEL BARRYMORE *as Billy Bones*
OTTO KRUGER - - - - - *as Dr. Livesey*
LEWIS STONE - - - - *as Captain Smollett*
"CHIC" SALE - - - - - - - *as Ben Gunn*
WILLIAM V. MONG - - - - - *as Old Pew*
DOROTHY PETERSON - - - - *as Mrs. Hawkins*

Directed by Victor Fleming - *Produced by* Hunt Stromberg

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

by Brett Halliday

"There are only two kinds of people in this world, Angel," Shayne told his secretary, Lucy Hamilton, "the quick and the dead." The detective's words turned out to be all too prophetic! 4

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When the shadowy target came through the door, the man with the gun focussed the crosshairs on the wide forehead. There was no way the bullet could miss. He squeezed the trigger . . .

The Quick and the Dead

by BRETT HALLIDAY

THE WAREHOUSE WAS NEARLY BRAND NEW BUT STILL rusting out because of the salt sea air. Like an errant tern he had built himself a temporary nest in the trusses by laying a couple of two by fours between them. For the last hour and a half he had simply waited.

When he had first started in the business, he had hated solitaire and thus cheated at it to win. But now as he went through the remaining deck three at a time, he was sure he was going to get all the cards out again. The first card turned had been a sign—the Knave of clubs. Out came an ace and he was home free.

Three games—three victories. Another sign.

Superstition was something they had trained him to rule out. "If you have to rely on luck," his Balkan instructor had once told him through yellowed teeth, "you're dead already." Still, he consulted his astrological chart, tried to pick nights like this when the moon was full, and always wore the same shoes. The great American athletes did the same thing. Some would eat chicken every meal, others would never step on the sidelines, and a few crossed themselves before shooting free throws.

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He put the deck of cards on a truss and checked his watch. Nearly ten. It would be soon now, he was certain. You developed a feeling for these things, a sense of how they would happen. Again that wasn't to be rationally explained.

He slid the attache case over and opened it up. Slowly, in the thin shaft of moonlight that sliced through the small tear in the roof, he began to assemble the rifle. A Libyan gunsmith had once told him that the idea for the weapon had first come from the American SAC bombers. Each plane carried rifles in case of a crash, but in order to fit in the survival gear they had been compressed into a hollow gun stock.

How ironic that an American idea would now be turned against one of them.

He pressed the butt of the assembled rifle against his shoulder. The clean smell of machine oil slithered up his nose. His trigger finger flipped on the Russian Starscope. Through the telescopic sight, the previously-dark warehouse glowed as though overwhelmed by red spotlights.

He could see, but his target wouldn't be able to.

His tightening fingers slipping ever so slightly, he realized the gun had been coated with an excess of oil. Using a handkerchief he wiped it dry. Why did they insist on issuing weapons rather than letting each man take care of his own?

He pressed another button. 10:04 flashed just below the crosshairs. If it had come with a pair of earphones, then he would have admitted the weapon had everything.

Waiting. It bothered some of the others, but not him. Waiting was the best part. He loved picturing the look on his target's face at the moment of impact. It was a better feeling than an orgasm, and it lasted longer. The mouth twisting with pain, the facial muscles tightening, the eyes knowing what had happened and being able to do nothing about it.

Then there was always memory. He could close his eyes and just as clearly as though it was his night for the base's VCR play back the videotape of his choice. His favorites were the Clint Eastwood movies, especially that plainclothed policeman. When Dirty Harry pointed that .357 at somebody . . .

He pushed the button. 10:06. He pulled out his handkerchief again and wiped his forehead. The south of the United States was unbearable, worse than the time they had spent with that fool Qadaffi and his "army." The humidity was with you always.

Too late he realized he had also wiped the machine oil across his forehead. No matter. Afterwards there would be time for a shower, per-

haps even a visit to that blonde who spoke English as though her tongue were simultaneously whipping cream. Captain Jourdaine had warned him never to see her again, to establish any sort of pattern, but to hell with him. If . . . when he succeeded, he deserved her and that fragrance of hers that reminded him of the machine oil.

In the distance just over the sounds of the waterfront he heard a car. For every thing there was a time, and his time was now.

He shuffled the deck, then cut.

The top card was again the Knave of Clubs.

Everything was with him. He would not fail.

10:08. In minutes it would be over.

Footsteps much too loud for rats approached. They were too deliberate, too perfectly paced to be anything but a cautious man systematically moving closer.

Two entrances. A 36-inch metal door at the far end, a barred window on the right. Which one?

The door.

He focused on it. Below the crosshairs this time flashed the meters. 113.

How easy. At that range he could pick the very mole he wished to hit.

The Starscope revealed what the naked eye would not have caught. The metal door quivered.

It was almost too easy.

In his mind he recreated the photograph they had given him. Of course it would be him. Who else would show up at this time?

The door opened. So his target was also an expert lockpick.

For the first time it struck him he did not even know the target's name. No matter. He would do as he had been instructed.

The shadowy figure came through the door. He focused the crosshairs on the wide forehead. His target was being cautious. He had some kind of handgun sweeping from side to side.

Just a few more steps.

MIKE SHAYNE KNEW HE WAS BEING WATCHED. HE HAD A strange foreboding when he had parked the borrowed car a good distance from the warehouse. The whole thing smelled like a trap, but that didn't matter. You did what you had to, and he had to go inside.

An eye for an eye. That's what it had come down to. It hadn't started that way, but now he was carrying an I.O.U. in his gut. No rest, no sleep, no nothing till he collected.

Despite the full moon outside and his eyes being accustomed to the dark, the redhead could barely make out the insides. Some crates, some

barrels, some canvas. A person could hide almost anywhere, and he was up against professionals of the worst kind.

He focused all his attention on his hearing. Mentally he swept the open expanse, trying to extend his consciousness to its farthest reaches.

His nose picked up a slightly different scent, but he wasn't sure what it was.

Then his eyes caught it. A slight opening in the roof where light sliced through and reflected off something.

Instinctively he lunged to the side.

Simultaneously the explosion echoed through the half-empty building.

Shayne felt the pain in his temple. Small, but growing. As though a wasp had stung him and the stinger had become a telephone pole.

He rolled over onto his back.

The ceiling whirled down on him like a reverse cyclone.

Something was dropping toward him. He wanted to reach out and catch it, but couldn't.

Nothing worked. First Lucy, and now him.

II

LIKE A FEATHER FLUTTERING THROUGH THE AIR, THE BIG detective's thoughts drifted downward, back into time. It had begun so innocently . . .

The redhead had leaned over and kissed her tenderly on the cheek. "Now that was a steak."

"Hey," said the brunette, getting up from the table, "I thought I did a pretty fair job, too."

"That's what I meant, Angel." He removed the slender, white candle from the brass holder and touched the flame to a Camel. "While you clean up, I want to check out Tim's piece in the *Daily News* on rising cocaine prices."

"Ah," said his secretary, throwing an apron over the v-cut summer dress, "while the woman washes the dishes, the gentleman retires to the study for brandy and cigars. I'm so sorry I haven't had time to restock the Martell."

"That's O.K. You can just bring me a cup of coffee."

She dropped the salad bowls she had just picked up into the sink, making a loud clatter.

"Just kidding, Luce."

"Just slipped, Michael."

A minute later he called, "I want to get to bed early tonight."

"Is that an announcement or an invitation?"

The redhead chuckled aloud. "You know I have to go up to Boca tomorrow. I want to get an early start."

"You're going to take the LeChampion case then?"

"I'm not sure, but I thought I'd at least talk to the guy and see exactly what he has in mind for the $1,000 he's willing to pay a day."

Lucy bent over and stuck her head through the opening between the bar and cabinets. Her face was mostly smile as she said, "I've got an idea. Things are pretty much caught up at the office. Why don't I drive up with you?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, come on. Hazel down the hall can handle any deliveries, the answering service is dependable, and . . . "

"Lucy!" He put down the paper. "You know how I feel about you getting involved in anything but the paperwork of a case. Besides, if LeChampion's offering that kind of money, he's either terribly rich or has some really dirty laundry he wants found and cleaned."

"Now I see, Mike. God, things haven't changed much, have they? The brave knight still sallies forth to do battle with the fire dragon, while the faithful female waits safely in the castle for his triumphant return."

"We've been through this before."

"Maybe, mister, I want to go through it again."

"Why? The results will be the same: you're not going out in the streets."

"Are you going to cut off my allowance and ground me for a week, too?" She shoved open the bar doors and stormed into the living room like an unexpected squall. "Michael, in case you haven't noticed, I'm not a little girl any more. I can play in the street without getting hit by cars."

"Lucy, I know you're a woman. I realize . . . "

"That's right. I'm qualified to cook, to clean up after you, to type your letters, pay your bills, buy your liquor . . . "

"That's not what I meant at all."

"Then, what did you mean?" Her voice grew more high-pitched wth each syllable. "You'll let me into your office, your kitchen, even your bed, but not your life."

What had happened? thought Shayne. What had started out as a romantic candle-lit evening with his beautiful secretary had turned into a third-degree by a woman he didn't seem to know.

He got up from the soft recliner they had picked out together. "I think I'd better go now."

"Why? I thought you liked fighting?"

"Lucy."

"The great private detective. Oh, he'll wade into the middle of a bunch of zonked-out junkies, but get him off his turf, get him into trying to deal with something less tangible, something more real like feelings and relationships, and he backs off. What's the term on the street for that kind of behavior, big Mike? When I went to school, it was *chicken.*"

THE REDHEAD SAW NO BLOOD, NO WEAPONS, BUT THE ENtire situation had become dirty. She was right in one respect. It wasn't the kind of cul-de-sac he liked getting backed into, especially when he was in unfamiliar territory. "I'll admit I may be a little overprotective," he began.

"A little, mister? A lot. Why must everything that happens between us be your choice, your way? Or, are you going to tell me that our whole relationship is just an extension of boss-employee?"

Relationship. Just the way she had said it cut through the detective. Whatever it was they had, it had always seemed to work, and as the old rule went, if it's not broke, don't fix it. Whatever it was they had, he had purposefully not tried to define it. As a kid he had never wanted to catch a butterfly either because every time someone did, they killed it.

He opened the hall closet. Somewhere inside she had put his blue sports coat.

He felt a hand on his arm. With surprising strength she tried to pull him back. She couldn't, but that didn't stop her from trying.

"Damn it!" she said, the frustration showing between the lines on her forehead. "I told you I want to see this thing through."

Gently Shayne pulled his arm loose and tried to put his arms around her.

"Break," she called out as though it were a boxing match. "You're not going to win this round by showing me what a macho lover you are."

"Angel, that's not what I meant."

"That seems to be your favorite song tonight." She pulled away and retreated to the sofa. "Please sit down."

Shayne walked over to it and started to sit.

"Not here," she said. "I want you where I can see you, not feel you. I don't doubt your physicality."

He faced her. "But you do doubt something?"

"Yes."

"What? That I care a great deal about . . . "

"I don't doubt that for a minute, Michael. It's how you care, the

composition of it, that concerns me."

"Come again."

She pulled her knees up close to her body and peered over them at him. "I don't want to be protected. I just want . . . "

"Angel, even if I were in the pizza pie business, I'd worry about you burning your hands on the tin, but things aren't that simple. My business is rough. I read where the average pro football player lasts less than four years. Every year past that I feel lucky. If I want to hang by a thread, that's my business, but I won't let you . . . "

"That's admirable, Michael, but that's *my* choice, not yours. If I choose to be protected, so be it. If I choose not to, you should honor that, especially if you care about me as much as a person as you claim."

Shayne ripped his jacket out of the closet and threw it over his shoulder. He started for the front door.

"Where are you going?" she said, the disappointment tinging her voice.

"Home to bed," he said. "If I'm going to have to make an extra stop to pick you up tomorrow, I'm going to need all the time I can get."

"Michael," she said, stretching out, "I can save you all the time you need."

He opened the door. "To paraphrase a friend, you're not going to win this round by showing me what a terrific lover you are."

"Damn!" she said to the closing door. "Damn!"

III

SHAYNE WHEELED THE BUICK OFF THE I-95 EXIT RAMP. Less than a mile toward Boca Raton, he found the entrance to the Elysian Fields announced by a huge, blue fleur-de-lis. He couldn't help noticing that across the street sat a beat-up red pickup with a big, crudely-scawled sign on it—FLORIDA FOR FLORIDIANS. The guard at the gate into the resort community, after checking his list, handed the redhead a blue pass card to leave on the dashboard and a map with an ink-drawn X on it. Following directions that his happy brunette companion gave him, the detective drove toward the clubhouse.

As they wound around a man-made lake on a black-topped street, Lucy commented on the wood and stone houses, the meticulous landscaping, and the water-sprinklers that popped up like periscopes from every lawn. "Not exactly your basic tract homes."

"You're right. Looks like these snowbirds fly south on their own Lear jets."

She reached over and squeezed his arm. He stole a glance at her. The

breeze blowing her back-lit brown hair into a surprising fullness, she reminded him of a model in a TV commercial. He had never seen her so alive.

"Michael, about last night . . . "

"That's the clubhouse, if I don't miss my guess."

He pulled into the circular drive. To Shayne it seemed huge without being big, classy without being ostentatious. Dark wood and trucked-in stone. European. The kind of thing you saw on postcards from the Continent.

A teenager in a white jacket opened the Buick's door for him. "The keys, monsieur, will be left at the desk for your convenience."

Shayne took Lucy's arm and led her inside. It reminded him of a castle. Obviously newly-erected from the smell of concrete and mortar, the building already had a lived-in quality.

"Tasteful," said Lucy. "The rich really are different from you and me."

"Yeah, but in this place it's not just money. I've seen a lot of these things over the years. Somebody here knows how to live."

The desk clerk took a look at the map in the detective's hand and said, "Mr. LeChampion will meet you at center court."

"Too bad," said Lucy, looking down at her sundress, "I'm not dressed for doubles."

"Remember, we're not here to serve and volley," said Shayne as they walked through the lobby.

"Whew! For a minute there I thought you were going to tell me tennis wasn't your racket."

THEY FOLLOWED THE SIGNS THROUGH HALLS ON WHICH hung subdued oils and loud animal skins. Obviously, decided Shayne as he slipped on his shades to go back outside, the decorator wasn't an environmentalist.

"Mr. Shayne," said a maitre d', holding the door for them, "Mr. LeChampion said to seat you at his table where he will soon join you. Follow me, please."

They were led to a white-umbrellaed table overlooking the center court.

"The Royal Box," said Lucy under her breath.

"May I get you drinks?" said the maitre d', handing the detective a menu.

Shayne looked at his watch, 8:54, and then at the menu. It was in both French and English. "Two coffees, black," he said, returning the menu.

They looked around the lavish grounds. Palms and seagrape grew everywhere. Not a single one of the surrounding clay courts was vacant. On center court Shayne noticed a tall man with grey temples and a youthful figure gliding across the court, effortlessly and repeatedly returning white balls hit by a young girl across the net from him.

Lucy said, "I'll bet you ten francs he's the club pro. Probably a Rene or Louis. Makes as much giving very private lessons off the court as he does on."

Shayne, not taking his eyes from the wordless ritual below, lit up a Camel and played on. "And the girl?"

"The daughter of some socialite. She either has aspirations for the pro circuit or . . . the pro."

"One thing, Ms. Hamilton," said the detective, trying not to sound patronizing. "In this business you've got to be careful about judging by appearances. The sleaziest scuzbag on the street often turns out to be a lot more respectable than the three-piece-suit in the corner office."

"Is that in Chapter I of the *Mike Shayne Detective Manual?*"

"That's experience," he said as a white-jacketed waiter put a cup in front of each of them and then poured from a china carafe. Each piece was embossed with the club's fleur-de-lis logo.

At 9:00 the male tennis player clad all in white called time. They both ran up to the net. The girl reached over and gave him a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

"Stick with me, Watson," said Lucy, her smug smile sitting atop the cup with the glow of a new day's sun on the horizon. "It's all elementary."

"Did you notice, Lucy," said Shayne, "this coffee's stronger than it looks?"

"It's nine, Michael. I wonder where your Mr. LeChampion is?"

"Mr. Shayne," said the white-clad tennis player. As he approached the table, he was slipping a white, v-neck sweater over his head. "I am Henri LeChampion. Please excuse my casual appearance, but I promised Teri that I would hit with her this morning."

The tall figure extended his hand, and Shayne took the powerful grip. The detective noticed the Club-Med tan that looked as though it had been carefully cultivated and the slightest hint of a French accent in the resonant voice.

Lucy Hamilton sat silently staring into her strong coffee.

"And who is this lovely creature?" said LeChampion.

As Shayne started to answer, the brunette extented her pale hand. "Lucy Hamilton," she said, lowering her voice and sounding matter-of-fact. "I'm Mr. Shayne's . . . associate."

Shayne noted that LeChampion, who had been about to kiss Lucy's hand, subtly turned it and shook it instead.

"Oh," said the tall figure, "my reports indicated that Mr. Shayne, like me, runs a one-man operation."

"You mean," said Lucy, "you checked up on it?"

Shayne shot her a glance that she didn't notice.

"My dear, I wouldn't buy a tennis ball without, as you say, checking up on it."

"She hits a fine two-handed backhand," said Shayne. "Is that your daughter?"

Lucy shot Shayne a glance that he pretended not to notice.

"She is beautiful," said LeChampion, "like her mother, but she has too much Chris Evert-Lloyd in her."

Lucy's gaze returned to her coffee cup.

Shayne said, "I noticed she prefers to hang out at the baseline."

"I have been trying to get her to take the net more," said her father. "The net, you know, is everything. Martina has shown that quite well."

"Your daughter certainly has the height and speed for serve and volley," said Shayne. "How's her power?"

"Ah, you understand the game," said LeChampion. "Le Premier must be special, must have everything. And someday Teri will be Le Premier. Her name is her destiny."

Shayne watched as the teenaged girl below smashed several balls hurled at her from a ball machine to the corners of the court. Each one hit within six inches of the baseline.

LeChampion reached into his back pocket and pulled out a gold moneyclip with the familiar logo etched into it. Peeling off some bills, he handed them to the redhead. "This is for coming up."

As Shayne put them in his billfold, Lucy said, "What exactly do you want us to do?" in her best business tone.

"This weekend I am sponsoring an exhibition round-robin match on that very court. The prize is $100,000, winner take all."

Shayne said, "Not bad for three matches.

"I have also guarantees for three women in the top ten of the women's circuit. It should be quite an event."

"Your daughter is the fourth player," said Shayne.

"Exposure," said LeChampion. "There is no substitute for it."

"Your daughter looks good," said Lucy. "Is she a professional?"

"Not yet," said LeChampion, "but this weekend will tell me whether four years of tennis camps, three ball machines, numerous professionals, satellite tournaments, and a lot of sweat have been worth

it."

"You don't really expect your daughter to win in that type of competition?" said the redhead.

"Of course not. If she can take a game or two in each set I will be a proud *pere*. Perhaps then even her mother will be able to appreciate what I have been able to accomplish with her little Theresa."

"I still don't see why you need us. Has your daughter lost her favorite racquet?" Lucy chuckled.

A strange look flashed across LeChampion's face. By the time he spoke it had vanished. "My dear Miss Hamilton, I wish it were something that innocuous. You see, lately I have been getting some night-time phone calls."

"What kind?" said Shayne.

"The worst. Each one is the same. The voice tells me that by Sunday my precious daughter will be dead."

SHAYNE STUBBED OUT HIS CIGARETTE. ALTHOUGH HE could anticipate the answers, he asked the perfunctory questions anyway. "Have you contacted the police?"

"No," answered LeChampion. "What could they do about a series of six fifteen-second recordings from six different payphones?"

Lucy said, "How do you know that?"

Shayne said, "You tapped your phone."

"I am not without means," said the tanned figure. "Some very new and sophisticated equipment has allowed me to trace the calls instantly, but we are not dealing with amateurs. Somebody is using a doctored, taped message from various points, all within a five-mile radius of the Elysian Fields."

"What do they want?" said Shayne.

"That is what has me worried," said LeChampion. "They never ask for anything. That I could perhaps handle. In my previous business I dealt with extortion on many levels."

"What business were you in?" said Lucy.

The white-sweatered man pointed to a tall, green bottle at an adjoining table.

"LeChampion. Of course," said the redhead. "That beer is Canadian."

"As was I. Four years ago I sold out the brewery, moved to South Florida, built this little home, and concentrated on something I had previously neglected, the most important thing in my life now—my daughter."

Shayne pulled out his notepad. Lucy followed suit. "Do you," said

the investigator, "have any idea who could be doing this?"

"A man with what I have is the target of many," said LeChampion. "Unfortunately, it is the price of wealth and power. I have received so many threats in my forty years they run off my back. But these are different—these are aimed at my daughter. My contacts tell me you are the best. Are they right?"

"You haven't given me much to go on," said the redhead. "What exactly do you want me to do?"

"First, be discreet. That's another reason I contacted you. You won't be recognized around here. I've already dropped the word that Mike Shayne, an old schoolmate, is my houseguest for the week."

Shayne pressed. "Do you want me to protect your daughter?"

"No. In this environment that I control I think I can do that. I have doubled my security force, and they check everything that comes in." He handed Shayne a paper. "Here is the list of the phonebooths and their locations. I want you to find whoever is making these calls and stop them."

"You still haven't given me much."

"That is why I am hiring the best."

Lucy interrupted. "Has anything even the slightest bit different occurred in your life since the calls started?"

LeChampion leaned back and stared at the rising sun. It was getting hotter. "Two things, maybe. The man who owns the property adjoining mine has once again started to protest this development."

Shayne recalled the red truck with its sign. "FLORIDA FOR FLORIDIANS."

"Exactly," said LeChampion. "Eben McCall exhausted every legal means to prevent Elysian Fields from becoming a reality. And as that sign indicates, he is not through yet. But, I must admit, death threats sound unlike his previous strategy."

"The second thing?" said the detective.

"Is even a longer shot. My ex-wife, I have been informed, is in town visiting some friends."

Shayne said, "Is she the type who would threaten her own daughter's life?"

"I hate to admit it, but our divorce was even nastier than it was costly. I fear that Claire would do anything to get back at me. You see, Canadian divorce laws are quite different from here, and I retained nearly everything."

To no one in particular, Lucy said, "A mother with so much hatred for an ex-husband that she would harm her own child." She shook her head.

"The world, Miss Hamilton," said LeChampion, "is sometimes not as beautiful as we would have it."

"Anybody else?" said Shayne.

LeChampion rested his chin in his left hand. "Of course I ruffled a few feathers with construction of this resort. And I know Mr. McCall is not the only person around here harboring a resentment of emigres, but any man who ventures outside his own cave makes enemies. That is another sad truth about this world."

Abruptly Lucy Hamilton said, "We'll take your case, Mr. LeChampion. You can count on us."

The figure in the white sweater turned to Shayne. "Does your associate's enthusiasm represent yours?"

Shayne said, "I'll . . . we'll look into things."

"Merci," said LeChampion, for a moment letting down his air of control. "I must confess that the last two weeks I have been terribly afraid."

THE DETECTIVE PULLED OUT THROUGH THE ELYSIAN Fields gate and turned back toward the interstate.

"LeChampion said McCall lives right up here," said the redhead.

Lucy Hamilton reapplied her lipstick in the mirror. "Well, Professor Shayne," she said when she had finished, "what grade would you give me on my first field trip?"

"Angel . . . Lucy, we're not playing a game. Somebody's life has been threatened."

"I know that, Michael. You're just mad because you didn't want me to come up here in the first place."

"No, I'm not mad *just* because of that."

"Oh! Did I say or do something wrong?"

"Why don't we talk about this later?"

"No way. Right now."

"O.K. I thought you did ask one really good question about anything out of the ordinary occurring."

"One question? One question as in only?"

Shayne wished he could have looked at her. "When you're dealing with people, reassure them with your professionalism, and that means not wearing your emotions on your sleeve."

"What are you talking about?"

"Remember how you reacted to the possibility LeChampion's ex-wife could harm his daughter? I might feel the same way, but I wouldn't let it show."

"Why not?"

"First, because clients like kids react to your reaction. If you show worry, you add to theirs. Second, when you're emotionally involved, you're not objective, and when you're not objective, you miss important details."

Her eyes brightened. "You mean clues."

"There's really no such thing as clues. That term may sound good in the movies, but in reality there's just a lot of detail that you've got to sort through in order to find out what's true and what's not. You talked too much. Ask a few simple, leading questions. Let the person do most of the talking. It usually makes them feel important. Listen and observe. Jot down things. Don't trust your memory."

"Anything else?"

He pulled away from a stoplight. "As I told you earlier, don't jump to conclusions."

"That reminds me—how did you know the girl was his daughter?"

"An educated guess. They looked alike. They were so busy playing tennis they didn't say a word. Have you ever watched lovers play? Their game is sociable. Also, LeChampion couldn't have been a pro because he never stopped to point out anything to her. Besides, most club pros are younger and would be forced to advertise the club logo or some manufacturer on their outfit. His was basic white."

"Oh, I didn't stop to think."

"That's just it. The book says there are only two types of people in the world, the quick and the dead. The difference between the two is usually that the former learns to think and observe. Well, here's the turn."

Shayne wheeled the Buick slowly onto an unmarked gravel road. They wound slowly through sand and wild grass while palmettos that had overgrown the trace tore at the car's body.

"Doesn't look like anybody uses this road anymore?" said Lucy as she rolled up her window to keep the dust out.

Almost a mile later the road spilled into an opening. Shayne tapped the brakes. A small bungalow of weathered clapboard stood across the clearing from them.

"Well," said the brunette, abruptly throwing open her door, "let's go talk with Mr. What's-His-Name."

"Hold it!" shouted Shayne.

As he reached for her exiting arm, something exploded overhead, spewing sand onto the Buick's grill.

V

SHAYNE DOVE ACROSS THE SEAT AND STRUCK HIS SECRE-

tary, knocking her through the door and onto the sand. Rolling her body, he draped himself over her. Assured the car stood between them and where the shot came from, he pulled the Smith & Wesson from the small of his back.

"You two just stay right where you are," came a voice from above them.

Cautiously the detective peered around the front tire. Above him he heard the muffled creak of a rusted windmill fighting against the wind. A four-posted tower rose up some thirty feet, but at its top was that resembled an old radar cone. Just below it was a platform on which kneeled a bearded man with a shotgun he was in the act of loading.

Shayne could have dropped him, but he called out, "Can we talk?"

"This here be private property. You two want to court, rent yourself a motel like everybody else."

Beneath him, Lucy Hamilton labored to breathe. Keeping his head up, the redhead lifted himself off her.

"Sir Walter Raleigh," she said, "you aren't."

"We want to ask you a few questions about the Elysian Fields," said the detective loudly.

"Time for talkin's through," said the voice from on high. "Now git."

"That your sign across from the development?" persisted Shayne.

"Was. Truck too. Now listen, young fella, I'm gonna declare a two-minute amnesty, but if you and that gunboat you're drivin' ain't gone by then, I'm gonna give it and you an air-cooled ventilation system."

The detective turned to his companion. "I'm going to slide across the seat. As soon as I'm behind the wheel, get in, but keep your head below the windshield."

"Aye, aye, sir."

When they were in position, the investigator started the car. He backed the first hundred yards and then turned around. As he pulled back onto the highway, Lucy spoke.

"What now, Sherlock?"

"You're going to city hall. I'm going to find an army-navy store. I've got an idea about what may be going on."

SHORTLY PAST NOON SHAYNE CREPT BACK DOWN THE road. When he neared the shack, he took to the undergrowth. Slowly he picked his way through the brush. When he approached the clearing, he heard a soft roar. He peered from behind a yucca. Sitting in a rocker was the snoring bearded figure. His shotgun lay across his lap like a doll. From the house came the sound of voices as though someone had

left the television or radio on.

The detective crawled over to the tower. When he was in the middle of the posts, he aligned the compass with the point protruding from the dish. Almost exactly south by southwest. He would have liked to have climbed the tower, but it was a risk. He would either wake the old man or the metal-fatigued structure would collapse.

A simple compass reading would have to do for now.

LUCY HAMILTON WALKED INTO ECKERD DRUGS SHORTLY after 2:20. Shayne put away the paperback he had been reading. If she had only been a few minutes later, he could have finished the last hundred pages and found out if one brave man could singlehandedly prevent the free world from falling into the grip of international terrorism.

She handed the redhead a card. It read LUCY HAMILTON & ASSOCIATES, ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS. Below were the Flagler Street address and phone number. "The bureaucracy bought it," she announced, tossing her hips to the side.

"The card, the story, or the walk?"

"All of them. Mother said I should have been an actress." She handed Shayne a cardboard mailing tube. "Why must I depend so on the kindness of strangers?"

He pulled the topographical map out. Holding the corners down with a sugar bowl, a salt and pepper shaker, and a cup of coffee, he placed the compass on the map, slowly turning the paper.

"Now," said his secretary, "would you mind telling me what you are doing? What does all this have to do with an old hermit?"

"Did you notice the top of the windmill?"

"The blades were gone."

"And he had a small dish installed."

"Radar?"

"Microwave, the kind used by the phone company now."

"You think the old man could have faked those calls from various phone booths by directly linking up to Ma Bell?"

"Only if he has line of sight. The dish must be aimed exactly at a microwave relay station."

"And?"

"According to this utilities' map, there's not one in that direction. Damn! I was so sure."

"So one bright idea doesn't pay off. There's always others."

"What did you say?"

"There's always others."

"No. Pay off." He got up from the booth and went over to a nearby

phonebook. He ran through the Yellow Pages, then made a call. In minutes he returned to the booth.

"Scratch one bright idea," he said.

"Why?"

"About the worst we've found is that the old man is stealing signals from a new pay-TV system that uses those dishes."

"Where now?"

"Back to square one."

SHAYNE AND HIS SECRETARY STROLLED OUT OF THE Elysian Fields' restaurant. *"Parfait maison,"* said Lucy. "I haven't had dessert like that since we left the French Quarter, but you probably still think the best thing to come out of France is cognac."

The redhead smiled at his dinner companion. Behind them the October sun had already set. He felt frustrated. During the afternoon and evening, he had asked around discreetly as an old school chum, but either nobody knew anything of the whereabouts of the ex-Mrs. LeChampion or they weren't saying. Square one was a dead end.

Lucy pulled a key out of her yellow cotton purse. "I still don't see why our host had to provide us with two separate rooms. They're not even adjoining."

"Maybe he assumes we really are associates and nothing more. Why? Which way do you want it?"

"Michael," she said, "don't be like that. Ever since we left Miami this morning, you've acted as though the two are mutually exclusive. Nothing's changed between us."

"Oh? I thought the whole basis for this little experiment was that something has."

"You know what I mean. Nothing between us is different. I mean, I still feel the same way about you."

"Do you? I wonder. Anyway," he said unlocking the door to his suite, "I want to spend some time thinking about this alone."

"I can help, Michael."

"You already have." He kissed her on the cheek. "Good night."

He closed the door to what sounded like a very unlady-like or un-associate-like oath. He kicked off his loafers and threw off his tie. Unbuttoning his shirt and pulling it out of his pants, he poured a glass of Martell and sat down in front of a blank TV screen.

He hadn't lied to her. He had needed time to sort out the case. But he knew there was another reason for his chosen solitude. Something had changed about their relationship, or maybe the change was just that he was thinking about it. Everything—the case and her presence—had

happened so quickly.

He drained the cognac and poured another. Something else troubled him. After all he had told Lucy about observing, something LeChampion had said, some term gnawed at him. The redhead glanced through his notes and mentally replayed the interview with the tall Canadian. Something was there all right, but he couldn't put his finger on it.

A knock came on the door.

He ignored it.

Another knock.

Probably Lucy, unable to accept the arrangement, unable to sleep. And her room was directly across the hall.

He sipped the Martell.

The knock was louder, more persistent.

All right. He walked over to the door and opened it.

LeChampion's daughter threw herself into the room and wrapped her arms around his neck.

THE BIG DETECTIVE PEERED DOWN AT THE BLONDE HAIR that looked like gold stretched to its thinnest. Her tanned skin was as taut and unmarked as a new drum. In a sleek blue evening dress she appeared much less like a tennis machine and more like a woman.

"Theresa," said the redhead, "I don't think this . . . "

"Mr. Shayne," she said, her voice on the verge of breaking, "I've got to talk with you, with someone."

"Easy," he said, feeling her shiver against his naked chest. He closed the door and led her over to a small couch. She sat down slowly, her gown wrinkling loudly in resistance. "What do you want to talk about?"

"I'm not sure. It's just . . . something's changed here all of a sudden. My father's become more like my jailer. There's always an employee following me around. Father won't let me leave the Elysian Fields."

"Did you speak to him?"

"He says for the next three days he wants me to concentrate only on my tennis, but I know he's not telling me everything."

"What makes you think that?"

"You, for one."

"Didn't your father mention that we were old school friends?"

"That's the story, but."

"But what?"

"I know all his friends, old and new, and you're not one of them.

You're not Canadian—listen to that accent. You're not a retiree, and judging by that old car and the way you dress, I'll bet you're not found at the polo club on Sundays."

Shayne couldn't help thinking she was doing a better job of detecting than his "associate." "What if I told you that your father and I go way back?"

"You're not old enough to." Her face, which was beginning to relax, suddenly contorted. "Damn it, Mr. Shayne, or whatever your name is, I only play games on the court."

"And you do it well." He could sense a fierce independence about her as he pulled out a Camel and lit up. "How do you think you'll do this weekend?"

"I'm going to win. Then I'm going to take my twelve, personally-strung, graphite racquets up to my father and break them one by one. But don't change the subject."

"I don't understand. You don't like tennis?"

"I used to love it until it became an obsession—his, not mine."

"Then why have you devoted your last four years to a sport you don't care about?"

"To please papa. At first I thought I was pleasing myself. Then I realized I was using it to hide from something."

"What?"

"I don't know why I'm telling you all this, but like I said I have to talk to somebody. You got another cigarette?"

"You're too young to smoke. Go on."

"Who are you kidding. I was doing grass when I reached puberty."

"You were saying?"

"In everyone's life we're destined to meet one special person."

"I'm flattered."

She almost smiled. "Not you. I met him four years ago."

"About the time of your parents' divorce?"

"Maybe Jean Paul was the pillar I needed to cling to when their home fell apart."

"So Jean Paul was what you had before you had tennis. What are you, eighteen now?"

"Almost nineteen."

"Weren't you awfully young then?"

"Is there a legal age for love? In Italy I would have been already past my prime."

"Was Jean Paul older?"

"How did . . . yes. Almost 20. So mature, so stable, so sure of what he wanted in this world."

"And that was you?"

"Partially. We met at one of Mother's many parties. He told me right then I was his ideal mate."

Shayne could see she was more in control. It wasn't so much that she had calmed down, but that her hypertension had been transferred into another emotion. "What happened?"

"Father. He said it was because Jean Paul was too old, but I know he always disapproved of J.P.'s politics. I mean, his were those of my mother."

"Which are?"

"The movement."

"The movement?"

"Mr. Whoever, if you were familiar with Canadian politics, you'd know that there's been a war going on between the French and English since Colonial times. Mother is a Mauriac, *tres* French, and thus a separatist. Her mother and father still believe that Adam and Eve spoke French in the garden."

"Your father is English?"

"No, but he's a moderate. Tennis was how he weaned me from mother, Jean Paul, and the movement."

The detective knew she had a maturity that belied her age, but he sensed no matter how calm her exterior, cracks ran through her interior, conflicts that hadn't yet been resolved and might never be. He put out the cigarette. "Where's your mother now?"

"Funny you should ask. She's already come down for the winter. Staying with some friends, the Voisins, in Delray Beach. She's called me a couple of times to meet her for lunch and shopping, but of course papa has me grounded."

Shayne looked into her eyes. Like her, they seemed to be just off center. "Maybe I shouldn't ask, but what do you want out of this whole situation?"

"You sound like Dr. Rosenthal, my shrink. If you mean, do I hope that someday my mother and father will get back together, the answer is no. I gave up that fantasy long ago. Do I want Jean Paul? I don't know. If we met again, he'd be a stranger. What happened to us back then seems like another incarnation."

"You seem to have a better idea of what you don't want than what you do."

"O.K., doc. I want to stop being everybody's tennis ball. I don't want to be batted around any more. Just left alone to be me, whoever that poor slob is. Maybe I'll choose a tennis dress or this"—she fingered the evening gown—"but at the very least I want to choose it."

Choice. He had heard that refrain so much lately it was becoming a female anthem.

Slowly she rose and straightened her gown. "Look, whoever you are, I appreciate your talking to me like this. I mean, the only other one I've talked to in the last few years, really talked to, is Rosenthal, and he's being paid. Thanks." She reached up and kissed him on the cheek.

A key turned in the redhead's lock.

"Michael," came Lucy's voice, "I heard talking, and the bellboy . . . "

Her mouth fell open.

"Oops," said Theresa LeChampion.

"Angel!" said Shayne.

"I think," stammered the brunette, pulling a bathrobe tightly around her, "I'm supposed to say something like 'Excuse me' and then you tell me, 'It's not what you think' and . . . "

"Miss LeChampion," interrupted the detective, "my associate, Ms. Hamilton."

"Enchantez" said the blonde. "Well, I've got to go. There's an employee out there who can't earn his pay unless he's got somebody to follow. See you around." She walked past a surprised Lucy Hamilton.

Shayne just smiled.

"Let's see, do I start with 'Michael, she's a little young, isn't she?' or how about 'So you wanted to be alone, Greta Garbo' or . . . "

"How about," said the redhead, 'Let me apologize for breaking in unannounced. I know it's none of my business, and I'm sure it *was* business . . .' "

"Hold it, Michael."

"Objectivity, Angel. Did you see anything happening?"

"Well . . . Was it business?"

"Absolutely. I got the ex-Mrs. LeChampion's address."

She stared at him. "Well, I suppose if I can bat an eyelash or two at a public utilities employee . . . "

"What's sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose."

"One thing, Michael," she said, retreating to the door, "if it happens again, the goose is cooked."

She slammed the door.

A second later her head reappeared. "Just kidding. Good night, Mr. Shayne." She softly shut the door.

Shayne locked it. He had had enough visitors for one evening.

VII

SHAYNE DROVE UP THE COAST WEDNESDAY MORNING

with Lucy and the rising sun on his right shoulder. The Delray Beach phone book had listed only one Voisin, and they lived on A1A.

Bordering on the Atlantic, their home seemed to grow right out of the lush, but well-trimmed subtropical greenery. The detective pulled through an open iron gate and parked under a seagrape. As they crossed the pebbled driveway and rang the front doorbell, the place seemed deserted except for a choir of off-key crickets.

A servant in a white jacket and even whiter face appeared in the door.

Shayne handed him a business card. "We'd like to talk to either of the Voisins."

"May I ask the nature of your business," said the man with a trace of a French accent.

"Personal."

"If you will wait a minute please." He shut the door.

Lucy adjusted the rope belt on her white dress and said, "Do you think they'll see us?"

"Why not. From the look of the butler they've just arrived and probably haven't filled up their social calendar. Besides, most people will talk to a detective, if only out of curiosity."

"Probably the same reason people consent to be interviewed by *60 Minutes,"* she returned.

The wooden door reopened. A portly man with a small, black mustache and tufts of hair that reminded the detective of dirty cotton candy appeared. He was wearing the many-pocketed shirt favored by Cubans and smoking a stogie that must have arrived on the same boat.

"Mr. Shayne," said the man, extending his hand. "Jules Voisin."

Shayne shook.

"What can I do for somebody who drove all the way up from Miami?"

"Actually," said the redhead, "I'm here to see a guest of yours—Claire LeChampion."

"Won't you come in?"

"Mike Wallace strikes again," said Lucy under her breath.

"This," said Shayne as they entered the living room, "is my associate, Ms. Hamilton."

"Ah," said Voisin, acknowledging the brunette for the first time, "I thought from the card that you were a one-man operation."

"Ms. Hamilton," said Shayne, "is a very recent addition to the agency."

"Glad to hear the economy somewhere is booming," said the host.

Shayne looked quickly around. The interior had that showroom ste-

rility, the nondescript blandness that decorators foisted upon people with more money than taste. He had furnished his entire office for the price of any one piece of furniture here.

"Jules," called a female voice from outside. "Whatever did the detective want?"

Voisin led Shayne and Lucy through a sliding screen doorway and onto a sun-lit patio. "Why don't you ask him yourself, Marie."

Two women sat separated by croissants and jam laid out on a silver tray. One, who was obviously Marie from her response, had covered her bulky frame with a designer gown that probably trimmed off 20 pounds. The other, a tall, stately figure, looked at Shayne with deep-set eyes that reminded the detective of a guard dog sensing an intruder.

"Surprise, Claire. Mr. Shayne and his associate are here to see you," announced Voisin.

"That's nice." The grey-haired woman shifted her athletic figure in the rattan chair. "I haven't dealt with a detective since dear Henri had one follow me all over Montreal that summer."

The heavy woman took a sip of her drink and said, "Whatever did happen to that nice man?"

Claire LeChampion bit off the tip of her croissant. "Why I seduced him of course, then sent him on his way."

"Well," laughed Marie Voisin, "judging from Mr. Shayne's 'associate,' this time you really have your work cut out for you."

Voisin interceded. "Mr. Shayne, Ms. Hamilton, I must apologize. I'm afraid the ladies haven't yet recovered from a rather lively welcoming party we had last night."

Shayne, glad Lucy was biting her tongue, said, "Ms. LeChampion, do you understand the principle of confidentiality."

"Certainly. Henri's lawyer was unbribable."

Disregarding her response as he knew he had to, the detective said, "Let's suppose I had been hired by an investment banker who was considering loaning your ex-husband some money to expand his development. Would you, knowing what you do about him, consider that a worthwhile risk?"

She reached out to a red leather case and withdrew a cigarette. Noticing a book of matches stuck in the side of the case, Shayne took the bright-green set and struck a match for her. She reached out and touched his hand while the flame caught, then took the matches from him. "I am sentimental about some things. Fortunately for you, Henri is not among them. If this imaginary banker were to loan my ex one million dollars, he would not lose money. Of course, Henri would not make much money with it either."

"Why not?" said Lucy.

"She talks," said Claire LeChampion.

"Among other things," said the brunette.

The grey-haired woman rubbed the filter across her lips. "Henri is too conservative. Not a man to take risks."

"Are you certain?" said Shayne, jotting down her response in his notepad.

Lucy interrupted. "Would you mind showing me the rest room? I'd like to freshen up."

"I'm afraid this experience has been too much for her," said Marie Voisin. "Jules." It came out an order.

"Mais oui," said her husband. "Ms. Hamilton, follow me."

The detective sat down at the rattan table across from the two women.

Claire Le Champion fingered her cigarette like a chess master contemplating a move. "You do not live with a man for over a dozen years without learning something about him."

"Still," said Shayne, "you two have been divorced"—he looked at his pad—"four years. Sometimes an emotional trauma can change a man. Have you been in contact with him more recently?"

"As a matter of fact, I spoke with that *fils du chien* just yesterday about our daughter. No, he hasn't changed."

"But you haven't actually seen him?"

"Seen him." She stared at the redhead for a long time. "No, I haven't seen him."

Shayne closed the notepad. "Thank you."

"Have others," she pressed, "said the same thing about Henri?"

He stood up. "Confidentiality" was all he said.

Jules Voisin escorted him back toward the front door where Lucy was waiting. As he crossed the room, he felt Claire LeChampion's eyes on his back as surely as if they were gun barrels.

As they pulled onto A1A, Shayne said, "What was that routine about 'freshening up' back there?"

She reached into her purse. "Watching that little interplay between you and the She-Cat of the North suggested to me she was a bit too possessive. Look what I found in the little girls' room."

She held up a bright-green matchbook exactly like the one Claire LeChampion had taken back from the detective. On it was written FAUCON BAIT SHOP.

"THERE IT IS," SAID LUCY, POINTING TO THE BRIGHT-green sign that mirrored the matchbook cover. She settled back in the

car's front seat. "You know, Michael, I don't know when I've had more fun. Maybe I was cut out for more than the 'Lucy-take-a-letter' kind of life."

Shayne, pulled the Buick to a halt in the gravel and sand parking lot, wondered how long it would take before she had the painters change the name on the Flagler Street office's frosted glass to read SHAYNE & HAMILTON, INVESTIGATIONS.

The detective surveyed the area. The bait shop itself was a small, concrete-block building with what had once been a bright-green tin roof. The open door and windows suggested natural air conditioning. The area around the building, laden with rusty motors, fiberglass boat parts, and other debris, looked like a powerboat graveyard. Near a rickety pier stood a gasoline pump, a relic of the 40's, whose oxidized cylindrical tank showed the abuse of bad drivers and careless attendants.

As Shayne got out, the brunette threw open her door. "Stay here," he said sternly. "I've got a feeling the people in there aren't the croissant and jam crowd."

"Come on, Michael. You don't have to get mad just because I've been doing better than you thought I would."

Shayne shot a steel-jacketed glance at his secretary. "In that place, a beautiful woman in a sundress would be like chum to a school of sharks. Look, there's no use asking for trouble when you usually get more than enough for free. Now, stay here!"

"Chauvinist!" she hissed.

"So be it," he said, punching down her door lock.

The Faucon Bait Shop lived up—or down—to his expectations. At the same time honky tonk music bludgeoned his ears, the stale odor of dead fish slapped his face like a cheap cologne. In a corner two men in bib overalls and no shirts played gin on top of a soft-drink cooler. Another slept against a sign touting Zebco rods and reels, while a fourth jabbed playfully at several creatures in an open tank. It was a toss up which they all had done last—showered or shaved. One of the card-players grunted a curse in what the detective recognized as street French.

One thought flashed in his mind—this was not the type of establishment usually frequented by wealthy snowbirds like the Voisins.

"You own this place?" said Shayne to a man in a tank top sitting behind the counter stirring shrimp with a bait net.

As though he were a chef concocting a delicacy, the figure never looked up when he muttered, *"Non."*

On the counter Shayne spotted a wicker basket with a small sign

taped to it: POUR LE PARTI QUEBECOIS. But there were no matches anywhere.

The detective held up the matchbook Lucy had given him in front of the preoccupied man. "Recognize this?"

The figure looked up momentarily, then back to his net. *"Oui."*

"Do you hand them out to customers?"

"Mr. Faucon gives them to his friends. Are you a friend?"

"A friend of a friend you might say. Is Mister Faucon here?"

"Non."

"Where can I find him?"

"J'en sais pas. I do not know."

The redhead tried a different kind of bait. "Henri LeChampion—ever heard of him?"

Shayne felt like he had just mentioned his broker was E.F. Hutton. Instantly the room went from disinterested activity to a concentrated focus—on him.

"I think you had better leave, *monsieur,"* said the tank top.

"Do customers always get this cordial a treatment?" said the detective, picking up a rod and pretending to cast.

The man jerked the Zebco from Shayne's hand. "There is nothing here for you."

The two men who had been playing cards stood up and moved toward the redhead. The sleeping figure woke up, and the other shifted his attention from the bait tank.

Shayne backed toward the door, glad at least Lucy was outside.

One of the card players pulled a filleting knife from his belt. "Mac," he said, "didn't you say you were running short of good bait?"

"Hey, guys," said Shayne, "wouldn't you rather play for a Michelob Light?"

Bib Overalls I came at the redhead like a moose in heat. The big detective cooled his ardor with a right front kick to the kneecap. The moose dropped. Bib Overalls II, who had decided late to attack, tripped over the sprawling figure. His knife thudded to the worn wooden floor.

A left elbow sent the sleeping man back toward dreamland. Mac came over the counter with what looked like the top half of a baseball bat. Shayne cracked a spinning rod across his face. When Mac brought his hands up instinctively, Shayne hit him with a right to the gut, then a left to the chin.

The man who had been prodding the tank appeared with a gaff in his hand. The redhead picked up the only thing nearby, a landing net. The gaff came at his face. Shayne sidestepped and caught the shaft in his

net. He twisted. His knee drove up into the spot where all men are soft. Somebody hit him from behind.

Shayne went with the blow and rolled toward the bait tanks. A bib overall continued to charge. Shayne dropped to one knee suddenly, then rose up. The force carried the charging figure up and into a bait tank.

Somebody reached for the filleting knife. The redhead's right loafer came down hard, and fingers cracked. Then Shayne teed off, placing his toe directly in the middle of the man's pigskin face.

Another staggered to his feet, looked at Shayne, and collapsed in a heap.

The redhead lifted up Mac and pressed his face against the wet counter. "Faucon's address."

Mac remained silent. Shayne applied more pressure. "Hey, pal, let me tell you what I do for a living. I recruit for a plastic surgeon. Get me mad and I can make my boss's day. The address?"

The limp figure grunted. Shayne twisted his head around, a bit farther than it normally went.

"Mr. Faucon," gasped Mac, "he live in that new development near Boca."

"Which one, pal?"

"Something Fields. Wait, the Elysian Fields."

"WELL, MR. MACHISMO," SAID LUCY, POKING HER MIDdle finger through one of the tears in Shayne's blue shirt, "you went to a lot of trouble to show me you were right about that place."

"Yeah."

"Guess you asked a few questions, sat back, and listened to them talk, huh?"

"Sometimes it works."

"What did you hope to accomplish in there anyway?"

Shayne started the car, then floored it. Sand and gravel spewed at the dilapidated building. "Lucy, sometimes you have to go fishing. And that calls for throwing your net in a lot of different places. Often you come up empty—every now and then you pull in a haul."

"I'm not interested in hiring a fishing guide. I asked a question."

"And I'm not teaching a course in detection." The Irish detective could feel his temperature starting to climb. "And I certainly don't want to explain everything I do to you."

"There you go, Michael. I question something and you overreact."

"Damn it, Angel, can't you understand? I've worked alone so long I don't stop to analyze everything I do. The job's become second nature

to me now—I just do it."

The period of silence ended when the redhead wheeled up to the entrance of Elysian Fields.

"Mr. Shayne," called a nervous-looking security guard as he rushed up to the Buick's window. "Mr. LeChampion has been trying to find you."

"Why?"

The guard took a deep breath. "His daughter is gone."

IX

SHAYNE SLID THE BUICK INTO THE SPOT DIRECTLY IN front of the clubhouse. He was out of the car before the parking attendant could arrive. Lucy tried to keep up with him as he hurried to the main desk.

"LeChampion," he said to the clerk. "Where is he?"

The employee pointed at a hallway beside the desk. "The door at the end."

Shayne didn't bother to knock. When he threw open the door, the tall Canadian was berating a middle-aged man in a white blazer with the familiar blue fleur-de-lis on the breast pocket. "Make me understand, Leon," said LeChampion, "how can a nineteen-year-old girl elude a man who spent twenty years in the RCMP?"

"Decorum! I certainly wasn't going to follow Miss LeChampion into the women's locker room," said the blazer. "And habit. Every day when she finishes her morning workout she goes in there, and one-half hour later she reappears. Today she didn't."

"Damn it, man," said the development owner. "You're paid to protect my daughter, not to make excuses."

Shayne interrupted the heated conversation. "How did she get out of the locker room then?"

"I found a window in the rear left open," said Leon.

"You checked inside, didn't you?" said the redhead.

"Of course," said the blazer.

"Was there a sign of struggle?" continued Shayne.

Leon bit his thumbnail. "No, come to think of it, there wasn't."

"Did you look in her locker?" said Lucy.

"What do you mean?" said LeChampion.

"Let's go," said the detective, "and bring your master key."

As the quartet hurried across the well-trimmed Bermuda grass, Shayne said to Leon, "While you were waiting outside for her, did you hear anything from inside?"

"No," panted the blazer, "nothing unusual."

LeChampion inserted the key in the lock and opened the locker room door. "Everybody out," he called into the room.

"I've already cleared the place," said the ex-policeman.

They rushed to the locker that LeChampion identified as his daughter's. The door was ajar. LeChampion jerked it open. "Her clothes are gone."

Shayne, spotting a canvas bin near the showers, examined it. "Was she wearing a white tennis dress trimmed in blue on the court this morning?"

"Yes," said Leon.

Shayne held up the still-wet outfit.

"If someone took her," said Lucy, "would they have taken the time to let her change?"

"What if they waited until she changed to grab her?" said LeChampion, almost in panic.

Shayne said, "Since Leon heard nothing and there's no sign of a struggle . . . "

"Wait a minute," said LeChampion, "are you suggesting my daughter went voluntarily?"

"Right now," said Shayne, "I don't know. I talked with her last night, and she was obviously upset about your treating her like a prisoner."

LeChampion reddened through his tanned face. "You were hired to find out who was making threatening phone calls, not to play father-confessor to my daughter. If you had done your job, she'd be here at this moment."

"Where have I heard that before?" said Leon.

Shayne pivoted and said, "Come on, Angel."

"It's Lucy," she said.

"Where are you two going?" shouted the tall Canadian.

"What you hired me for," said Shayne. "To do my job."

"THE ROYAL COACHMAN," SAID LUCY. "ACCORDING TO the map the desk clerk gave us, it's the house down there, the one with the beat-up van in front of it."

Shayne drove the Buick past the house. As he did, a handsome dark-haired man in jeans and a t-shirt appeared at the front door. He walked straight to the van.

"That hunk's awfully young to be a retiree," said the brunette.

"And unmarked vans don't make deliveries in a place like this."

"You want to follow the van?"

"I'd like to, but I think talking to Faucon is more important. The

trail led out of here and now back."

"Then let me tail that van." Her voice was almost a plea. "I mean, you never told me what you learned at the bait shop, so I'm not going to be much help inside."

Shayne pulled his key out of the ignition. "Wait here, and don't even think about using your set."

"Michael!"

Heading back toward Faucon's, he didn't pay any attention to her. When the van came by, the detective glanced at the face of the driver. An unformed thought started to grow in the back of his mind.

He rang the doorbell.

A graying, angular man opened the door. High cheek bones and a sharp nose made him appear to the redhead like his name. "Mr. Faucon."

"Yes?"

Shayne held up the green matchbook. "Is this yours?"

"They're from my shop, if that's what you mean?"

Shayne stepped past the surprised man and into the spacious ranch-style. It was littered with newspapers, most of them in French. "I was at your place earlier, and frankly your employees have a long way to go to learn the customer's always right."

"You! *Mais oui,* red hair, torn shirt. My employees said you came out there and caused trouble. There's always someone who wants to give *emigres* a hard time."

Bingo. It was the second time he had heard that word. LeChampion had used it in their first conversation. That's what had been bothering him. "What's your connection with Henri LeChampion?"

"Look," said Faucon, his eyes wandering back and forth between the redhead and the papers, "I bought a house in this development from him. That's all."

Shayne could see Faucon was upset. Why? Simple irritation or was there something deeper behind the impatience? The detective felt almost as uncomfortable as the hawk-like house-owner though. He couldn't search the home, and he didn't really have any specific questions to ask anyway. But sometimes you threw a rock in a pond to get a ripple, and if the ripple became a wave, so be it.

"I think you'd better leave," said Faucon. "One of the advantages of the Elysian Fields is its security force. Would you care for a demonstration?"

"That won't be necessary—now," said Shayne, abruptly turning and walking past Faucon.

As he stepped into the noonday sun, he blinked his eyes to be certain

he was seeing correctly. The Buick was gone.

IMMEDIATELY THE REDHEAD BROKE INTO A TROT DOWN the blacktop road. It was less than a mile to the clubhouse. His mind considered the chances. Had an irritated Lucy gone back to the clubhouse on her own? He felt uneasy. That was only the best possible scenario.

The sweat pouring off his body, he rounded the curve to the clubhouse. "My car," he called to the attendant. "Have you seen it lately?"

"No, sir. Not since you left a while ago."

So much for best possibles. He kept running, straight into the clubhouse and almost hitting a couple of golfers. He continued down the hall. As he opened the door, LeChampion was pouring himself a straight shot of Chivas Regal.

The redhead grabbed the Canadian by the lapels. The glass tumbled to the plush carpet as Shayne shoved him against the wall. "I don't have time for doubletalk any more. The stakes may have been raised, so tell me whatever you know about the movement—quickly."

LeChampion looked more surprised than scared. "How did you know?"

"I'm a detective, pal. Loose lips and divorced women sink ships."

"Claire."

"You're the one who called himself an *emigre.* Shoot! Why do you consider yourself a political exile from Canada? I haven't read about any purges north of the border."

LeChampion held up his hands as though covered by a gun. Shayne let go of him. The Canadian retreated to the chair beside his desk and sat down. "The real reason," he finally admitted, "that Claire and I divorced is the movement."

"Le Parti Quebecois?" said Shayne, remembering the basket in the Faucon Bait Shop.

"No, the SLQ."

"SLQ? What's the difference?"

"Le Parti Quebecois is a legitimate political party. It gained control of the provincial legislature in '76 and still fights against British interests in Quebec. *La Societe de Liberation du Quebec* is a terrorist group started in the '60's."

"The two aren't connected."

"No. The SLQ are a bunch of fanatics."

Shayne rasped his left thumbnail across his already-stubbled chin. "Are you telling me your ex-wife is associated with this terrorist

group?"

"She comes from a long line of French families. As a Mauriac, she was born into money and separatism. I think the high point of her life was not our marriage, not even the birth of our daughter, but the visit of Charles de Gaulle to the World's Exposition in Montreal in 1967. She interpreted his support of the separatist movement as legitimizing the SLQ's extreme methods."

"And you wouldn't go along with her?"

"I have always supported *Le Parti Quebecois* and their legitimate aims, but not SLQ and their mindless brutality."

"Is your wife still active in the cause?"

"More than ever, I am fairly certain. She and others are what radicals call faces, well-known and respected people whose job is to propagandize in order to raise bloodmoney."

Shayne recalled the party the Voisins had mentioned having. "Sort of Tupperware for Terror?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Let me ask you," said the investigator taking a long shot, "was there any connection between your divorce and what Claire was doing with your daughter?"

"Absolutely! That's why I took Teri from our estate outside Montreal and fled. I had a detective verify everything I have told you, and I learned from him that Claire planned a type of marriage of convenience for my daughter with an up-and-coming SLQ scion."

"Jean Paul."

"Yes, Jean Paul Mallarme."

It was all starting to make sense. "Do you know a resident of this place named Faucon?"

"He bought a house from me."

"Is he connected to one or both of the SLQ and your wife?"

"I . . . I don't know."

The sudden ringing of the phone on the desk startled them both.

Henri LeChampion answered. "The local police," he announced. As he talked, his face grew pallid. "A car wreck. Is it bad? Is she dead? How did you know to call me? I see, the pass card. Yes, I'll . . . we'll be right there." He hung up.

"Your daughter?" said Shayne.

"I am sorry," said the Canadian, "but I'm afraid it's your associate."

X

SHAYNE PRESSED HIS SWEATING FOREHEAD AGAINST THE

cold glass of the ICU. It was the closest the hospital staff would let him to her. Inside, the woman who had been so much a part of his life, whether she knew it or not, lay motionless. A snake-like snarl of tubes and wires connected her to machines that seemed to stand around her bed like silent sentries.

He knew he was looking at the very thing he feared the most, the reason he had tried to keep her out of harm's way.

A short, foreign-looking doctor carrying a clipboard emerged from the glass-paneled room. His face wore that non-committal look that the detective had seen so many times before.

"Doctor," said the redhead, "how is she?"

The white-coated figure looked up from a chart. "Are you a relative?"

"Closer than that."

The doctor started to object, then caught sight of Shayne's steel-gray eyes. "Well, I guess I can . . . "

"Come on, doc, is she going to be O.K.?"

"Miss Hamilton was in a bad wreck. The good news is there was nothing broken. The other, she is unconscious."

"I can see that."

The doctor drummed his pen against the clipboard. "I have to admit we don't know when she'll wake up."

"Thanks." The redhead turned away quickly so that the doctor couldn't see his reaction.

The white-coated figure looked at Shayne's still-torn shirt. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah, doc," said the detective absentmindedly. "Fine." If only he had taken the keys from her purse.

"Shayne," said LeChampion from behind him.

The redhead paused, then turned. "Yeah?"

"I talked with the investigating officer. He tells me a witness saw the entire incident."

"What happened?"

"It was no accident."

"I was afraid of that."

"Your associate was forced off the road by a pick-up truck. Old and red, I think he said."

Shayne remembered the truck parked across the road from the Elysian Fields.

"I can't tell you how much I regret what happened," said the tall Canadian.

Shayne nodded.

"Why don't I drive you back to my place," said LeChampion.

The detective appreciated the sentiment, especially from a man who was probably just as worried about someone he cared for, but he shook his head.

LeChampion persisted. "There's nothing you can do here. The police are sending a copy of the report over to my office and"—he tapped his wallet—"anything unofficial they turn up."

Shayne stared a long time at Lucy Hamilton. Calm, distant, and white, she looked like a statue, the kind you could admire but never possess.

"Come on," he said finally. "This waiting'll kill me. I've got to do something."

SHAYNE CAME UP EMPTY—TWICE. THE RED PICKUP WAS parked on the front of McCall's property, but a close inspection showed the vehicle sat on concrete blocks rather than tires. Then Faucon's house was deserted. A very illegal search bothered the detective only because it revealed no leads.

Frustrated, the two men returned to LeChampion's office. By dusk they had gone through one police report and one bottle of Chivas Regal. If the hospital answered "No Change" one more time, the detective was ready to explode.

Shayne finally grew tired of passivity. "Let me have your car keys."

"Where are you going?"

"The Faucon Bait Shop. Maybe it's time for a tidal wave."

"I'll go with you. I'm beginning to think you are right about my daughter. I don't think she was kidnapped."

No one had to tell the redhead that the two of them were sharing more than expensive scotch. Each labored under the weight of guilt, a feeling that you've failed someone when they needed you.

The phone startled them both. LeChampion picked it up.

"Hello," he said, looking at Shayne as he pressed the conference button on the base.

"Mr. LeChampion," came an accented voice through the amplifier, "I know you never wanted to hear from me again."

"Jean Paul!" exclaimed the tall Canadian.

"Oui. Etendez! Your Teri she is with me."

"Is she . . . "

"Safe, for the moment."

"If you do anything . . . "

"It is not me. I do not have time to explain. They do not know I am calling."

"They?" interrupted Shayne loudly.

"We are in a large warehouse just down the street from Faucon's shop. That is all I know. You must come before . . . "

The line went dead.

"Hello, hello," pleaded LeChampion.

"Your keys," said Shayne.

"I am going with you."

"No. You might get another call. Besides, I don't want another victim on my conscience."

"Still, I am going."

Shayne dropped him with a sudden right to the jaw, then fished the keys out of his pocket.

THE DETECTIVE PARKED IN THE PALMETTO NEAR THE bait shop. The smell of dead fish hung heavy in the night air. A little way down the sand and gravel road the warehouse rose out of the wet foliage like a giant tombstone.

For a case that had begun in the Elysian Fields, the abode of the dead, it seemed appropriate it should end here.

XI

Cautiously the figure in fatigues crept through the warehouse. At the moment he had pulled the trigger, the target had moved. The Starscope had shown the victim being struck, but the shooter seemed to be taking no chances.

The body lay in the shadows. A .38 rested off to the side. As the rifle-carrying assassin drew closer, blood pouring from the forehead and covering the victim's face in a thick veil of red became visible.

Holding the butt of the .30-caliber rifle, the gunman prodded Shayne's motionless body with the barrel.

A meaty palm grasped the warm steel and shoved up hard.

The butt-plate rammed into the gunman's groin. He released his grasp and grabbed his crotch.

Shayne leaped up. Despite the ringing in his head and still-blurred vision, the redhead lashed out.

His fist caught the edge of the nose. Cracking bone echoed through the darkened expanse. Instinct took over as the detective took out his anger.

The gunman offered no resistance, but Shayne pummeled him with a flurry of heavy blows anyway. Finally, as his antagonist crumpled to the concrete floor, the redhead felt the return of reason.

Yeah, he wanted to keep on hurting the guy, hurt him bad, but he

needed him—at least for the time being.

Shayne picked the limp figure up and stretched him against a crate like a target on a straw backdrop. Then he retrieved the Smith & Wesson. It took a few slaps on the would-be assassin's bloody, mashed face until the puffed eyes opened into narrow slits.

"O.K., pal," he rasped, "I know this toy can't pick off flies at 400 yards, but from one inch it'll get the job done just fine."

"What, what do you want?" The words and blood trickled out together.

"First, confirmation. Who are you working for?"

This time only blood emerged from the open mouth.

"Do the letters SLQ mean anything to you?" said Shayne.

The man's facial reaction answered the question.

"Second," continued the detective, "I want to know where I can find Teri LeChampion."

The figure tried to spit blood, but it just drooled out the side of his mouth.

Shayne cocked the revolver. "I don't have time for twenty questions."

The man's eyes registered the message, but his lips didn't move.

Shayne backed up and pulled the trigger.

Struck in the kneecap, the gunman jerked, then continued to writhe in pain.

"There are twelve areas of the human male anatomy that can be the source of excruciating pain," said the redhead clinically. He recocked. "You want to know where number two is?"

"No! No!" called the figure.

Shayne let him know anyway.

Before the echo had died, the figure was screaming, "I'll tell you, I'll tell you."

This time Shayne let him.

BENEATH THE LIGHT OF THE FULL MOON THE FARMhouse lying amidst the scrub pine and palmettoes reminded the detective of those landscape paintings that seemed to hang in the hallways of every public building in the state. Appearances could be deceiving. According to the redhead's babbling source, the SLQ had just moved into this abandoned shack from the warehouse.

He crept closer, the sand and cool breeze penetrating his torn, blood-covered shirt. Maybe he should have called the police, but he couldn't be sure they would even have believed his story. If they had, by the time they had gotten the assault force assembled, two people could be dead

and the SLQ on their way to Quebec.

Besides, the more he tossed the possibilities around inside his head, the less he could be certain that anyone was in danger. He had only Jean Paul's word for that. What if the phone call had been to set up LeChampion, to bring the Canadian—not him—to the warehouse? That was something he should have asked the unsuccessful assassin before binding him.

No guards. Not even dogs. But then, why should there be? Nobody knew they were there.

He ducked behind a Cadillac with a Quebec plate. Several trucks had Florida licenses. One of the trucks was red and dented. He didn't even have to look for scrapings of the Buick's paint. Beside it was the beat-up van he had seen at Faucon's.

Crossing a weed-covered driveway, Shayne pulled himself up to a lighted window. Faucon was arguing with Jules Voisin. Their quick, slurred French was almost impossible for Shayne to decipher, but he could see the short Canadian was upset.

The detective slid down the clapboard side of the house. The peeling paint and pitted surface suggested that the shack had not been lived in for quite some time.

At another window Shayne rubbed off some dirt and peered in. Several boxes marked C-4 sat piled. To the side of the explosives Shayne spotted a couple of new crates with Uncle Sam's imprint. All had ordinance stenciling—.45 CALIBER THOMPSON SUB-MACHINE GUN, M-79 40MM GRENADE LAUNCHER, 7.62MM MACHINE GUN M60.

A depot for an underground railroad north—terrorist style. How many Canadian snowbirds flocked home with death hidden in their RV's?

Still no sign of Teri LeChampion.

The redhead crawled toward a shaft of light at the house's rear. Familiar voices floated through an open window.

"Why can't you see, Theresa," demanded the shrill tones of Claire LeChampion, "that this is the only way? I want my children to live in Free Quebec, not my children's children."

"But," said Teri LeChampion, "why can't you work for your goal the way father does?"

"His way is too slow. We must act now, and with resolve. Tell her, Jean Paul."

"Perhaps if you would leave us alone."

Shayne glanced in. The last speaker was the handsome figure he had spotted driving the van at Faucon's.

Claire LeChampion pivoted and left the room. The redhead came through the window instantly.

"Mr. Shayne," gasped the girl.

The detective put his finger to his lips.

"Is this the man you told me about?" whispered Jean Paul.

"Yes," answered Teri.

The door to the room suddenly reopened. Claire LeChampion said, "Theresa, I . . . "

The tall woman, seeing the detective, slammed the door and screamed.

Shayne pulled out the .38.

The door cracked open, then widened like an unstifled yawn.

Faucon and Jules Voisin stood in the doorway. Each held a handgun.

"So he did come," said Faucon.

"A professional like Mr. Shayne would never let Henri venture into such a dangerous situation," said Voisin.

"The American was too good for even the Knave of Clubs," said the woman.

"But we have him, nonetheless," said Faucon.

"You knew I called them," exclaimed Jean Paul Mallarme.

"Not knew, my boy, but let," said Voisin. "You have been a useful pawn since we brought you down from Quebec. That is right, we have long known about your desire to leave the movement. We decided to use it."

Jean Paul started at the short Canadian. Faucon intercepted the young figure with a gun barrel across the face.

"Be careful with that thing," warned Voisin. "The explosives we have just stored are very volatile, and the rest of our group won't be back for a few hours to take them to the dissemination points."

Shayne trained his .38 on the man he knew was the movement's leader. If he had to go, the detective would at least cut off the head. "So you threatened Henry LeChampion."

"Of course," answered LeChampion's ex-wife. "We needed his money, his prestige."

"But," said the detective, thinking aloud, "he wouldn't scare, so you decided to use the one thing he loved the most as leverage."

"Mother!" cried Teri LeChampion.

Cooly the gray-haired woman said, "Sacrifices must be made, my dear."

"You bitch!" shouted the girl. "How long have I been on the altar of your cause?"

"Merde!" said Voisin. "This is no time for family spats."

Teri LeChampion helped a bleeding Jean Paul to his feet. "You knew," she said, "that I would come with Jean Paul if he asked. It was an easy way to get me out here so you could ransom my father's support."

"Yes," admitted the woozy figure. "They told me that if I could persuade you to come with me, and they got what they wanted, we would be permitted to go away together, away from all this hatred and meaningless bloodshed."

"Like I said," spat out Voisin, "the boy has lost his taste for the necessary."

"Well, no matter," said Faucon. "Soon we will have Henri and his money in our pocket, and we will be able to eliminate any possible problems."

"You're not going to kill us?" said Teri. "Mother?"

Claire LeChampion dropped her head and turned away.

Shayne, seeing his chance, quickly lifted his leg and threw a sidekick. It caught the gray-haired woman under the rib cage. She shot forward into the two men standing near the doorway. The three dominoed to the floor.

Before Shayne could yell, Teri LeChampion was out the window with Jean Paul close behind.

Shayne took two steps and dove. Glass shattered around his thick body.

They were sprinting into the darkness. Shots flashed from the room behind them. Shayne caught a stumbling Teri LeChampion. A bullet thudded into a pine over his right shoulder.

"Don't fire in here," warned Faucon loudly. "The plastique."

At a hundred yards the three escapees were knocked to the ground by the sudden explosion. A huge fireball rocketed upward. Then the night sky rained wood and glass shards.

"Mother," called Teri LeChampion.

But in the dying yellow light Shayne could see there wasn't a single tear in either of the young girl's eyes.

XII

SHAYNE SPOTTED MOVEMENT ON THE DISTANT EDGE OF his dream. Instantly awake, he whirled and faced the intruder.

Henri LeChampion stood in the doorway. "They have moved your associate to a private room. That is a good sign."

The redhead turned back to his vigil. "What time is it?"

"Almost noon. They tell me you haven't moved for a day and a half now."

The detective stared down at the unconscious Lucy. If he had to wait for hell to freeze over, he was going to see this through, till she recovered or . . .

"I thought it might help," said the tall Canadian, "if you knew that what you did was worthwhile."

Shayne rubbed his neck and arms, his eyes never leaving the brunette.

"Federal agents were waiting for Voisin's men when they showed up," continued LeChampion. "The F.B.I. didn't get them all, but they're positive that between their roundup and the explosion the SLQ is going to be off its feet for a long time."

"And Teri?"

"I cancelled the tournament. It no longer seemed important to either of us. We spent most of yesterday talking. An awful lot of things came out into the open for the first time, things that have needed talking about for a long time. The gist of it is that my daughter is going away for a while—maybe college, maybe Europe, maybe even a tennis camp." He tried to laugh, but couldn't pull it off. "Whatever it is, it will be her choice."

Shayne noticed his blue shirt was torn. "What about Jean Paul?"

"I think the boy had a sincere change of heart. Of course he is in jail now, and though I can see my daughter's feelings toward him are not what they once were, I will do anything I can in his defense." He looked wistfully out the window. "And Claire, she was so beautiful."

Despite what the woman had done to LeChampion, Shayne could sense there was a place inside the man where she would always be.

The tall Canadian turned from his reverie and extended his hand. "This is awkward. You know I can never fully pay you. The check, the car repair, the hospital bill are but a small token."

The redhead nodded as LeChampion left the room.

Shayne returned his attention to the silent woman his eyes had never left. Emotions, he had warned her about them, but who had warned him? "You know, Angel," he found himself saying, "unless you wake up, I'm going to be lost. I mean, here I am with a large check, and I don't even know where in hell to find the deposit slips."

Lucy Hamilton's eyes fluttered. "Second drawer on the right," she said slowly. "My desk."

Shayne smiled. ●

There is nothing uglier than the remnants of violent death. The killing had been done with a knife, messily. The body lay face-up, a grotesque sculpture of twisted shadow under the desert moon. Most of the blood had seeped away into the sand, leaving a black splotch-like blight on the crystalline earth. Silence lay heavily on the scene, broken only by the mournful call of a coyote in the foothills miles away. How, *I wondered,* how in the world did I get involved in this?

The "B" Murders

by MIKE TAYLOR

TWO WEEKS EARLIER I WAS EUPHORIC. ALLIANCE PICtures had picked up the options on three of my Dan Dolan stories. They planned, they said, to do a series, ala The Lone Wolf, Philo Vance, etc. The movies would be cheap, quicky "B" productions, but what the hey? It was a chance for fame, exposure beyond my wildest dreams. Even more ego-bursting was a subsequent telegram inquiring whether I would be interested in doing a treatment of the screenplay for the first picture, *Bullets for Blondes.* In Hollywood. Would I? Leave New York in dreary mid-February for the balmy climes of Southern California? Ah, rapture!

The only fly in this whole ointment was that Elizabeth couldn't go along. Just after New Years she had landed an assistant editor's job with *Liberty,* one of the biggest slicks in the nation. It was a prestigious step—more important, steady income!—and there was no way she could leave it. Especially with my tenure in the film capital being of an uncertain duration. I might last a month or I could be on the next train back.

So on the 19th of February 1938, I boarded the Super Chief for Chicago. There I changed to the 20th Century Limited for the long ride to L.A. I recall very little of the trip: crossing the murky Mississippi into Iowa that first afternoon out of Chicago; the barren, cropless plains of Kansas; the imposing rise of the Rockies as we sped westward; all flashing past the windows like an endless series of technicolor postcards. I divided time between my compartment and the dining car, remote in contemplation of what might lie ahead.

After three endless days we reached the City of Angels. A phone call from the station got me in touch with Paul Oakes, a former New York writer who had manufactured (under another name) a particularly gory string of creeping menace novels for me at *Shocking Mystery Stories* before heading west to try his luck as a scriptwriter. He'd gone to work for Alliance and it was through his generosity that the Dolan properties had been brought to their attention.

He picked me up an hour later in a year-old Buick roadster and we roared off toward the land of dreams. Oakes was a thin, kinetic chain-smoker who scattered ashes and acid comments equally about as he tooled down Sunset Boulevard.

"It's a nuthouse out here," he said, jerking a thumb at a woman in a sequined evening gown holding onto a lamppost for dear life. It was mid-afternoon. "People live like they're making up for lost time. Parties around the clock. The women, well, they're not like anything you've ever seen. Marriage is only an interlude between divorces. Welcome to Gomorrah, sucker."

"Sounds like a jaundiced view," I said. "I thought you enjoyed a lot of success out here, Paul. You couldn't wait to get away from the Apple."

He shrugged as we took a corner on two wheels. "I've done all right. Alliance has me on a $200-a-week retainer. I work mostly on serials, patching up some other hack's mistakes. Even did one with Breezy Eason."

"Maybe you can give me some hints. Frankly, the idea of doing a screenplay for the studio is pretty intimidating."

A sour grin. "Write fast and don't try to be artistic. You'll be okay. Just one rule to remember: there are two kinds of people out here, the users and the used. What happens the first couple of days will determine which class you wind up in. Don't let anybody step on you."

Good advice, as it turned out.

THE FIRST PERSON WHO TRIED WAS THE PRODUCER, Harry Bregman. He was a short, cigar-chomping wheeler-dealer type

who talked in staccato phrases and stabbed with an index finger to make his points. A fringe of black hair horseshoed a bald pate and his pudgy features were perpetually squinched up, like a cat about to get smacked. He was my welcoming committee to Alliance the next morning.

"Great to have you aboard, sonny," he rapped, pumping my hand and pulling me into a barren 6 x 8 office with a desk buried in papers, two metal chairs and a file cabinet. "Let me cover a few of the basics. One, we're on a tight schedule here. Shooting starts next week on *Bullets for Blondes.* No time for prima donnas, if you catch my meaning. Two, I'll need your treatment by Friday. If it's usable I'll take you with us on location. You can whip up the daily segments there and make changes as need be. Questions?"

"Several," I said dryly. "What's this about locations? I thought you would be shooting on the lot. Most of the story takes place indoors."

He snorted. "The big guys have lots. Fox, Republic, RKO. What we've got is this compound and lease rights over at Warners where we're three months behind on the rent. So it's location or nothing. A few minor changes and *Blondes* will do just fine as a desert shoot-'em-up."

I blinked. "A western?"

"No, no. A private dick in an outdoor setting. A resort. We're going out toward Twenty-Nine Palms. A little place that went bust last year. An artesian well and a dozen tourist cabins. It's perfect. We can shoot there and house the company too. Do something along the lines of Cagney's gangster movies. A lot of that was outdoor stuff."

It sounded odd, but what did I know about making pictures? "Who's the director?"

"Mad Mike Doyle, who else? He does all our action stuff. he can bring the picture in under budget in three weeks. And not have it look cheap. You'll meet him Friday in our pre-production meeting. Have that treatment ready, okay? Lots of action, that's our stock. Questions?"

"Yes. What about my—ummm—salary?"

Bregman tugged at his chin. "$150 a week plus expenses—reasonable expenses. That sound okay? We like what you do, we'll keep you around, put you on a retainer."

"Forgive my bluntness, but I get the feeling this is a shoestring operation. If your budget's so tight, why did you bring me all the way out here instead of using local talent?"

He grinned bleakly. "'Cause you're cheaper, that's why. A lot of these jokers belong to the union. You got a place to bed down, kid?"

"I'm staying with Paul Oakes right now. If we're going out Monday I guess there's no reason to look for a place yet."

"Good, good, Oakes will be coming with us, to help with the scripting. He's done a few of these, knows how to separate the wheat from the chaff. It'll be a blast, you'll see."

"One thing, Mr. Bregman."

"Yeah?"

"I may be new to this game and I may be scab labor, but I know what decent writing is. There'll be no butchery of my characters if I can help it."

"Don't tell me, you're another Fitzgerald," he said sourly. He was scowling at the litter of papers on his desk as I left.

I AVERAGED EIGHTEEN HOURS A DAY AT THE TYPEwriter during the rest of the week at Paul's small flat on Wilshire. He gave me coffee and a lot of useful tips. The closest I got to seeing anything of Hollywood was a scraggly palm tree dragging its tired fronds against the window.

By Friday afternoon and the preproduction meeting the treatment was done—just under a hundred pages. Bregman professed to love it. Mad Mike Doyle wasn't so enthusiastic.

"This calls for a lot of different interiors," he grumbled. "We're going out in the desert to save money, dammit. We need more action shots, out-of-doors scenes."

He was a big flame-haired, beer-bellied Irishman, nose and cheeks bright with broken capillaries. We argued that point around the table for awhile. Besides Doyle and Bregman, Paul and me, there was Mark Seldheim, the assistant producer, and the two leads, Francis Parker and Nadia Shaw. Parker was a swarthily handsome, slightly stoop-shouldered actor who had made a reputation playing heavies—not exactly how I envisioned Dan Dolan. Miss Shaw was a knockout, unless intellectuals were your type, an ex-Goldwyn girl, blonde and giggly and cute enough to stuff.

"I don't see why we have to go out in that old desert," she pouted. "I'd much rather perform in a studio."

"Whatever you do, my dear, it can hardly be construed as acting," Parker drawled. "Don't go 'star' on us."

"Well, of all the overblown—"

"Can it!" Mike Doyle snapped. "You two aren't going to carry your feud into this picture. We're on a tight schedule and we can't afford any stupid distractions."

Mark Seldheim laughed unconvincingly. "I'm sure Mr. Parker and

Miss Shaw will be totally professional on the set. Assuming we ever decide whether the treatment is acceptable."

He was a peculiar young man, cherub-faced, overweight, all forced joviality but fidgety as a cat around Harry Bregman. I couldn't tell if he liked his work or hated it. Bregman ragged him constantly.

"Look, you're going to have two writers on location," Paul said finally. "Let's wait and see what we've got to work with set-wise. Maybe the resort will work for some of the interiors. If not, we'll improvise, change some of the scenes to outside."

There was grudging agreement on that. I was on the payroll. A lot more talk about the logistics of the trip followed. Bregman made sure everyone understood that the entire cast and crew was to assemble in the studio parking lot at seven Monday morning. Transportation would be waiting to ferry us out to the desert.

"Anybody who misses the caravan gets docked," he snarled.

That left Paul and me free for the weekend. Instead of sampling the delights of Babylon, I spent most of it worrying over changes to the script. I wrote two letters to Elizabeth. Paul stumbled in after sunrise on both Saturday and Sunday mornings, red-eyed and fuzzy, and slept the days away. He didn't say what he had been up to and I didn't really know him well enough to ask. I did convince him to drive out to Tarzana Sunday evening, where we spent an hour or so marveling at what the brainchild of one writer had created.

The trip to the desert took most of the morning, eight cars and four trucks rolling along in convoy. Gigantic plumes of dust rose in our wake once the orange groves and macadam roads were left behind. Harry Bregman rode in the open lead car, standing up every few miles to signal halts or turns like an old-time wagonmaster.

Paul and I shared his roadster with a burly equipment man named Turnbull. We were far back in the line. There was little to see but the tailgate of the truck in front of us, fading in and out through the roiling clouds of dust.

Paul spat through dried lips and said bitterly, "Glamour."

"Yeah," I said. "Ain't it wonderful?"

I was a little worried about him. He looked haggard, not surprising after the long weekend. But there was something else, a certain bleakness of attitude that hinted something was eating at him. I had made a few oblique comments trying to draw him out but he hadn't volunteered any disclosures. Hollywood burn-out?

A final turn-off at a needle-like rock formation and we rolled into what had been the Desert Springs Tourist Camp. A dozen small cabins and a rambling adobe main building were clustered around a rock-

rimmed well and a small oasis of palms. It was an appealing setting for the middle of nowhere, brown hills shimmering in the indeterminant distance, eerily quiet once all the engines had been shut off. The original owner had overlooked only one thing: access. Had the place been anywhere near a major route it might have blossomed like Palm Springs to the south. Instead the abandoned buildings and untended well were just the remains of an old dream gone sour.

The company—there were twenty-six of us—piled out and began milling around, looking over the place and, very soon, scrambling for the shady spots. The single-wall frame cabins were all the same, divided into two rooms, the larger a kitchen-living-dining room combination, the smaller a sleeping area. Toilet facilities were out back. Although the buildings had been empty for over a year, very little deterioration had occurred in the dry heat. The big lodge boasted a flagstone courtyard, a dining room with a huge picture window, kitchen, and spacious quarters where the owner had undoubtedly lived. Bregman immediately appropriated these as his command post. Although the cabins were unbearable in the noonday sun, the thick white walls and tile roof kept the main building fairly comfortable.

After a cold lunch thrown together by the cook, a dour Swede named Gustafson, unloading began and by sundown things were pretty well organized. The well water had been tested and pronouncd drinkable, the kitchen was in full operation, everyone had moved into his or her quarters, the cameras and sound equipment had been unpacked and readied for tomorrow's shooting. Mike Doyle was already out scouting locations for the exteriors.

AFTER DINNER MOST OF THE CAST AND CREW SLOWLY gathered around the old well under the palms, smoking, drinking coffee, enjoying the stark beauty of the desert at sunset. I'd heard about the abrupt transitions that occur at dawn and dusk. No exaggeration. One minute people were wandering around bellyaching about the heat while the first evening star winked out; the next everyone was shivering and going for jackets or sweaters as night fell. I was on my way back from the cabin Paul and I were sharing when I literally ran into Eunice Boyd.

She was a co-star, third billing, the only other female in the picture besides Nadia Shaw. Her role, as she liked to put it, was that of "bad girl gone worse," the two-timer who, among other treacheries, sets up Dan Dolan for the mob. Eunice possessed sinister Slavic good looks, dark hair pulled back from a widow's peak, a slim, no-nonsense figure. Beneath that severe appearance, however, lurked one of the finer senses

of humor in the cast. And perhaps the only genuine sense of modesty.

She was muttering "That bastard!" and striding along like a drill sergeant when she banged into me. We both rebounded a little and stared at one another.

"What's the problem?" I asked, catching her shoulders to calm her down.

"Bregman! That's the problem!" she spat. Her dark eyes finally focused on me. "You're the new writer guy, aren'tcha? He's poison, friend. Take my advice and scram out of here while you're still a human being."

Her expression went from ferocious to rueful to tears in a matter of seconds. "Tell me about it," I said gently.

"I was just invited to show my gratitude for getting this lovely part," she said savagely. "We had a little wrestling match. Guess who was trying to pin who?"

"Bregman made a pass?" I said, not really surprised. "He doesn't waste any time."

"He's known around the trade as 'the octopus'." She shivered. "What a detestable man! Unfortunately, I need the work."

"Let's get some coffee," I said. "Most of the folks are over at the well stargazing."

She relaxed once we were surrounded by people who were laughing, chatting, acting normal. The well, someone insisted, had been there for decades, perhaps even was Spanish in origin. It was circular, about eight feet in diameter, with a four foot wall of mortared stones. A tripod of huge oaken beams met over the center, from which hung a chain hoist with a steel-bound bucket for drawing water. No one knew exactly how deep the well was, but peering down with the light just right you would see water moving far, far below.

Paul joined us. His mood had altered 180 degrees from that morning. He was jovial, wisecracking, apparently in high spirits. I thought, as he lit a cigarette, that his pupils looked a little dilated. I told him why Eunice was upset and he sneered.

"That s.o.b. is notorious for his casting couch. Want to take bets on how our leading lady got the part? Harry Bregman doesn't give anything away. Somebody should castrate him."

"Amen," Eunice affirmed.

Just then Jay Rauch, our gaffer, came up. He was a stoop-shouldered little guy from Brooklyn, with a big, broken nose and bleak, furtive eyes. They scuttled up and down Eunice's frame, dismissed me, and settled on Paul.

"See youse a minute, Mr. Oakes?"

Paul looked at him hard but said, "Yeah, sure. 'Scuse me, folks."

Undercurrents, I thought as they walked away, whispering conspiratorily. There were plenty of things going on here besides making a movie that a newcomer might miss. I resolved to keep my eyes and ears open to attempts to fathom some of the complex interrelationships that existed. Hell, there might even be a story in it. "Dan Dolan Goes Hollywood."

IF ANYTHING FAILED TO GO WRONG ON THE FIRST DAY OF shooting it wasn't for lack of opportunity. Doyle had decided to do a scene about two-thirds of the way through the script, where Dolan and his girl, Marjorie, are captured by a crew of baddies because they think he knows where some stolen money is hidden. The dining room, its furnishings still remarkably intact, was cleaned up to be used as the set.

Well. First of all, Nadia Shaw couldn't memorize her half page of dialogue for beans. She stumbled and stammered and giggled through retake after retake, while Francis Parker got hotter by the minute. When they finally did get a take, somehow the camera aperture had been joggled. That set the director off. It quickly became apparent why he was called Mad Mike. After he had finished storming around, kicking over chairs and chewing out everyone from God down to the handyman, it took three more tries to get it in the can.

Enter Harry Bregman, who had a brainstorm about using the whole crew for a crowd scene near the finale. I protested that I didn't have a crowd scene. "So write one," he said tersely. Paul put a restraining hand on my shoulder. We sat down and wrote a crowd scene.

As the day ground slowly on toward late afternoon, Doyle decided to squeeze in one of several fight scenes needed for the picture. Parker and the old stuntman, Hank Zimmerman, squared off in the courtyard to run through it once. They circled each other, threw two or three feints before Zimmerman promptly decked the leading man with a solid right to the eye. He claimed it was an accident but I wasn't so sure. I thought I had seen a brief look of satisfaction cross the lined face as he connected. And I had earlier heard he refer to Parker as a pompous ass. The eye swelled up at once and closed. That meant we had to shoot around the leading character for a day or two. Doyle was furious, again.

"Is it always like this?" I asked Eunice Boyd over a late dinner.

She chuckled. "Only when they try to do everything on the cheap. Alliance is in hock up to its rafters. They need to turn a quick profit on a couple of pictures to keep operating. But Bregman won't spend any money to bring them in. Everybody just fumbles through, hoping for

the best."

"Will he finish this one? I'd hate to see my first shot at the movies go down the drain."

"Don't worry, there are some pros here. He should make it. If someone doesn't wind up killing someone else."

Prophetic words.

HARSH SCREAMS FOLLOWED BY SLAMMING DOORS AND the babble of voices jerked me from a sound sleep. I sat up, groped for the kerosene lamp, lit it. Paul was gone.

More commotion outside. I glanced at the alarm clock as I struggled into pants and shirt. It was one-twenty a.m. and all was apparently not well. I found my shoes and got out the door in a stumbling run.

About half the company was already gathered around the figure splayed on the sand, halfway between the well and the main building. I wedged my way through. At first I couldn't make out who it was. Then I could. My heart sank.

In the moonlight Paul's face looked like a mask carved out of ice. He had lost a great deal of blood. The killer had wielded a knife recklessly, slashing and plunging it repeatedly into the chest and stomach.

I knelt beside him, checked the pulse out of habit. Nothing. One queer thing: his left front pants pocket was turned inside out. I glanced at the ground for spilled contents, saw none.

Harry Bregman charged onto the scene, eyes afire with anger and personal outrage. "What's going on here? My God! He's been murdered. Just what I need! Did anybody see it?"

No one had. There were plenty of protestations of disbelief, murmurs of shock, queries of "Where were you when . . . ?" Nothing helpful.

"I suppose we'd better notify the law," Bregman declared. "Mark, what county are we in?"

"San Bernardino," the assistant producer replied.

"Swell. They love me there. Somebody has to drive into the sheriff's office, tell them what's happened. We'll cover the body, leave it here at least until morning. They'll have to make it snappy, before the sun comes up . . . Bryant?"

"Yes?"

"The two of you were pretty tight. Both writers, staying together. You know anything about this?"

"Yeah. I killed him out of professional jealousy. So he wouldn't get any credit for this marvelous script." Now I was beginning to sound like one of them.

"Watch it, young man. Think you can handle the job on your own?"

I bit my tongue and nodded.

"Okay. We roll at seven. Let's all get some rest. Mike, who can we spare from tomorrow's work to stay with the body?"

"I'll do it," I said without enthusiasm, while Doyle was looking around for a non-essential. "I wouldn't be able to sleep anyway."

So it was that I spent the remainder of the night with Paul's corpse, brooding, wondering if I was some kind of lightning rod that attracted violent death. I had seen enough of it during the past eighteen months to raise doubts. I speculated numbly on what twist of fate could have brought Paul Oakes down, just as he was achieving some success, and, more urgently, who in this small company was responsible. Once again I felt like the quintessential outsider.

Two deputies in a morgue truck from the sheriff's office arrived just after sunrise. They examined the body, took statements, fished around for motives and clues, ran a half-hearted search for the murder weapon, working all this in around the filming, and went away that evening no smarter than when they had come. Through it all they radiated quiet contempt: we were all movie people, equally suspect for our unorthodox behavior in the eyes of the law.

AFTER DINNER THAT NIGHT BREGMAN HELD A PEP RALLY in the dining room. I was at a table with Eunice Boyd, Francis Parker and Mark Seldheim.

"This has been a shocking, shocking occurrence," he began piously. "I know it was a struggle for us to get through today. I'm proud of you all. Regrettably the sheriff's men have come up with no leads to poor Paul's murderer. The sad fact remains: someone here is a killer. If you have any suspicions or knowledge of this act, please come to me with them at once. In the meantime our work must go on. I don't have to tell you how important this picture—every picture—is right now to the studio. I hope we can continue to pull together."

There was scattered applause. Eunice wiped a phony tear from the corner of her eye. "It's what you want to pull that's the problem, buster."

"I believe you can relax on that score," Parker said. "As I was leaving Harry's digs before dinner who should I see going into the sanctum sanctorum but our dear Miss Shaw. Perhaps they've reached an arrangement."

"Hmmm. She *is* at his table. The barracuda meets the maneater. How appropriate!"

"I think you're being unfair," Mark said. "Mr. B is under a lot of

pressure. He needs this picture to keep Alliance afloat."

"I don't see how you can keep on sticking up for him," Eunice shot back. "He treats you like dirt. Mark, get this. Mark, do that. Mark, kiss my butt."

"I'm learning the trade," he said sullenly. "Yes, I do a lot of scutwork. But Mr. Bregman has been good to me. More than you know."

She sighed hugely. "Very well, dear. I think you're being overly charitable. But to each his own."

"He's not so bad," Mark insisted stubbornly. "I'm sure he feels very badly about what happened to Mr. Oakes."

"Don't we all," Eunice said. "You know, I'd sure like to know who aced him. And why."

So would I, lady, I thought grimly. *So would I.*

THE NEXT DAY'S SHOOTING WAS THE SMOOTHEST SO FAR. Nadia shaw actually learned her lines, Parker was emoting more like the tough private john I had envisioned, even my rewrites made it through Mad Mike Doyle's meatgrinder directing style relatively unscathed. I began to have some hope for the picture. The impact of Paul's death receded, not forgotten, but set aside to meet the demands of production.

I was summoned to a story conference with Doyle and Harry Bregman in his quarters after the evening meal. The next few days would be exterior work; we laid out the shooting segments and worked over the plot to give it a more outdoor thrust. It was well past dark by the time we were finished.

The usual group of people were gathered by the well when I walked back to the cabin. I didn't feel very sociable. Storylines were still rattling around in my brain. As I approached the cabin door I was surprised to see a beam of yellow inside through the front window. Flashlight?

I opened the door cautiously, quietly. A figure was bent over Paul's bunk, going through his belongings, which had been stacked on top. The flashlight beam was wavering badly. I crossed the room in two steps and tackled the intruder solidly. I was aware of softness and perfume as we went to the floor. I took the flashlight away easily and turned it on—Nadia Shaw!

"And just what were you doing?" I asked, pulling her up. She didn't look at all well compared to a few hours earlier. Face drawn and sweaty, hair tangled, a little tic under her left eye. Her nose was running.

"I w-was looking for something," she muttered.

"In Paul's things? What?"

"J-just stuff."

I shook her a little. "Come on, Nadia. Creeping around in the dark with a flashlight? What is it?"

"C-coke," she said weakly.

I stared at her like a moron. "Cocaine? Paul had cocaine?" Memories of his erratic behavior flashed across my mind. "He was a user, wasn't he? And so are you."

Her arms trembled under my hands. "Please. I need a hit bad. I haven't had one since this morning. Paul was my source. Help me find it; I'll give you some."

I let her go. "Find it yourself. Have you considered there's a good chance that's what got him killed?"

She was quickly back rummaging through his possessions. "What? The coke?"

"Yes. Particularly if he was a dealer. How many other people did he sell to?"

A distracted shrug. "Paul never talked about other customers. I'll bet there are plenty of users in this company though."

"Where did Paul get it?"

"Who knows? Ahhh!" She held up a small cylindrical container full of white powder triumphantly.

I looked at it curiously. "Is that all there is? Doesn't seem like much of a cache."

She shook her head, carefully drawing a small line of powder on the back of her hand. "I think he was running short. The night he was killed Paul hinted that he was having trouble with his supplier. Ohhh, God!" Her eyes became rapturous as she snorted deeply.

I turned away, walked over and lit the lamp. It chased away the shadows in the room but not those that had invaded my head. No question but that I was the outsider looking in. All this had been going on under my nose while I blithely assumed events were as innocent as they outwardly appeared. And now Paul was dead, possibly slaughtered by a knife-wielding drug pusher. Suddenly I longed for good old New York and its more familiar dangers.

NADIA DEPARTED IN A ROSY FOG, PRESUMABLY TAKING the rest of the evidence with her. I didn't care about that. If the men from the sheriff's office hadn't caught onto that angle during their investigation, bringing it up now wouldn't do much good. Assuming drugs were behind Paul's death, I might find out something by paying attention now that I knew what to focus on. And if what Nadia had

said was true about the source drying up and others on location being users, some pretty jittery people should be waltzing around shortly.

Still, I felt a need to confide in someone more in the know than myself. Eunice Boyd seemed like my best bet. I instinctively like her; she was a bit more down to earth than the general run of movie people I had encountered.

I strolled out to the well, where the gathering had become a nightly routine by now. I found Eunice there, chatting with a man from the make-up team, and got her aside. When I had outlined my suspicions she didn't seem surprised.

"It's a way of life out here, sweetie. If you're successful you use dope to keep going; if you're not you take it to keep up your hopes. I don't know about specific people in this company—live and let live is my motto." She sighed. "But if your friend was murdered over it that changes things doesn't it? Look, I'll ask a few discreet questions, see what I can find out. Nadia's my roomie, you know. That might be a good line into something."

The next day Bregman kept me too busy with rewrites to leave any time for detecting. We were shooting outdoor action around an impressive outcropping of lava rock several miles from camp. Between Bregman's chintziness and Mad Mike Doyle's maniacal pace, *Bullets for Blondes* was rapidly being transformed from a detective story into a wilderness safari feature. Of course, I was probably being overly critical—there was a lot of good action and most of my dialogue survived intact. It was just that the settings seemed so inappropriate.

That evening Eunice and I had a few minutes alone at the table before dinner.

"I think I'm onto something," she murmured. "Boy, if I'm right—this could be a juicy one, as scandals go. I still need to check out a few things, then I'll let you know."

"Don't forget we're talking about a potential murderer," I said. "Be careful."

"Oh, I will. Don't worry; devious is my middle name."

Twenty-four hours later she was dead.

IT HAPPENED OUT AT THE ROCKS, JUST AS THE AFTERnoon light was starting to fail. Ironically it was Eunice's last scheduled day of shooting. I was working on a piece of crucial dialogue, using the tailgate of the equipment truck for a desk, when I heard the frantic shouting from the other side of the outcropping.

I leaped up, nearly knocking over my Underwood, and sprinted toward the source of the commotion. The upthrust formation was

roughly rectangular, rugged sides reaching twenty feet high at some points. The vehicles were parked in the shade, so I had to race several hundred yards around to the sun side.

The sight wasn't pretty. A huge slab of rock pinned Eunice to the ground, covering her from the waist down. A dozen men were already trying to raise it, without much success. I joined them, along with Francis Parker and other late arrivals. Finally it began to shift and one end came up. Eunice moaned in agony.

As soon as the rock was clear I knelt beside her, trying to ignore the blood and the distorted lower body. "Someone bring me a wet cloth!" I yelled.

"Get going, dammit!" Harry Bregman amplified.

Her eyes, dull with pain, searched for and found mine. I saw recognition flare in them.

"No accident," she said clearly. Then, "Shirt pocket," and died. Just like that. I felt a rush of dizziness.

I wasn't sure if any of the others crowding around had heard. Under the pretext of closing her eyes I leaned over and plucked the scrap of paper from the pocket of her checked blouse, crumpling it into my palm. I stood up.

"Forget the cloth," I said harshly.

"Anybody see what happened?" Bregman demanded.

"I did," Mark Seldheim said hesitantly. "Or at least I got here just afterwards. A piece of rock apparently cracked off, came right down on her. Must have been the heat causing it to expand."

"Yep, that's how it must have happened," Rauch, the gaffer, concurred.

Bregman glared at them, for once seemingly at a loss for words.

Scanning the face of the rock, I didn't see any sign of a fresh split. I recalled Rauch's brief encounter with Paul just before he died, now suspicious-appearing from hindsight. Another customer? His killer? Or was I starting to see a conspiracy where there was only coincidence?

I glanced down at the dead woman at my feet. There was nothing imaginary about that. If her death was an accident I *was* Scott Fitzgerald. She had scared someone while snooping around. I remembered the piece of paper I was clutching, wandered a little distance away from the group and unfolded it. A few brief, hastily scribbled words:

Midnight—at the well. Come alone.

I crumpled the note back up and stuffed it in my pocket. From whom? It didn't really matter now. Whoever had arranged the meeting wouldn't show up. Would they? Not unless they had seen me take the

note or already knew who Eunice was working with. In which case . . . Did I have anything better to do at midnight?

Back by the body Nadia was acting or being hysterical, I couldn't tell which. Mike Doyle looked sad, bemused. Francis Parker smirked. Harry Bregman was busy giving orders, no doubt dreading another visit from the sheriff's department. I left them all playing their various roles and walked the whole way back to the camp alone.

IT WAS CLOUDY THAT NIGHT, A RARE OCCURRENCE IN the desert. I got up at a quarter to, had a long drink of tepid water, ambled casually outside and tacked a course towards the well, trying to look insomniac.

As far as I could tell, no one was around to be interested. We had been working long days; those of an honest persuasion were probably dead asleep. That reminded me: Eunice's body lay in a small storage room off the lodge's kitchen, awaiting the investigators from San Bernardino. I was waiting also, to dump the whole affair in their laps. Responsibility for her death was gnawing at me.

I leaned against the old well wall, musing over who might have constructed it and how much work had been involved. The nearby ground was trampled hard from the nightly congregations. Not a breath of air stirred the palm leaves. Someone had left a coffee cup sitting on the rim nearby. It clinked against the stone as I picked it up, a muted chime in the utter quiet of the desert night.

That small sound was engulfed by an explosion at the back of my head. I was falling, twisting over and over in black space. My feet scraped something, then my head; a second later I was immersed in icy-cold water. That shocked my numbed brain awake: I had been thrown into the well!

I sank deep, swallowed water, came up gasping and choking. The air was dank and earth-laden but breathable. I kicked my shoes off, treaded water, gingerly touched the back of my head where a knot like a hardball was rising. If I had been totally knocked out . . . well, I had enough troubles right now without worrying about what-might-have-been.

Water sloshed against the walls around me. I could feel the slight pull of a current. It was pitch black, with a tiny gray circle far overhead that had to be the top. How deep was the damned well? Maybe I could just tread water until the cook came by for a bucket of water in the morning. Right. I tried to recall the position of the bucket as I had stood at the edge. Logically it was always at the top whenever someone finished drawing water, but the old chain-and-pulley was worn; the bucket had

a tendency to gradually slide back down.

I peered and squinted upwards until I was convinced I saw a tiny spot of black that remained stationary against the larger circle of gray as I moved around. It had to be the bucket. Care to bet your life on that? I moved over to the wall. My legs were already getting tired.

Now I detected a faint luminosity from the stones. I felt over them; they were rough, jutting, with finger-sized cracks in between where the mortar had shrunk. I didn't imagine for a second I could climb all the way out, but if I could get as far as the bucket . . .

Something eeled against my leg in the chilly water. That got me started. One hand up, scrabble for a fingerhold. Then the other. I raised my torso out of the water, dug with my toes for a purchase, found it, levered up a few inches, then repeated the whole procedure. In five minutes I was gasping for breath, in ten my fingers and toes were numb, bleeding. I needed a rest but it's tough to relax when you're hanging on for all you've got. It was going to be a hell of a climb.

Since I couldn't stay where I was, I edged up a few more feet. Pain began to flare along the backs of my legs. I knew then I wasn't going to make it. The bucket was still an unguessable distance above. My arms and legs felt as though they were seconds from giving out. I thought about Elizabeth back in New York. Would she ever learn what had happened to me? Would anyone? Maybe, I mused cheerfully, my mouldering body would eventually foul the water supply and alert those above to my fate.

Well, the hell with that. A little spark of anger ignited deep in my brain. I thought of Paul's death, of Eunice's. And now my own. Someone was going to get away with triple murder, not to mention dealing cocaine. What was it Eunice had said about a scandal? The spark grew, became an ember of realization. Scandals don't revolve around lighting technicians, or cameramen or bit players. They feed off the people at the top. Well-known, important people like Bregman, Doyle, Francis Parker, Nadia Shaw.

I gritted my teeth, gained another half a dozen stones. Their surfaces, originally slippery, had gradually dried out to where it was possible to get a decent grip. I came to a place where a chunk was missing, thrust my whole arm into the hole and hung my weight on it, resting the remainder of my body a little. Then I started up again.

At least an eternity passed before I found myself level with the bucket, still perhaps thirty feet below the surface. It was a fraction brighter. Next problem. The bucket was dead in the middle of the well, a good four feet from the wall. My hold was precarious and my back was to it. But I had come too far now to quit.

Somehow I claimed another couple of feet, until I was above the bucket. With a little prayer all non-believers save for special occasions, I jumped out from the wall and turned all at once. Bull's-eye! My feet hit the bucket, my arms wrapped around the big, rusty chain.

Then what I should have anticipated happened. Under my weight the worn chock on the pulley above let go with a loud ratcheting noise and the bucket plunged clear to the bottom. I managed to hang on, winding up hip-deep in the water again. At least I had something secure to hold onto.

While I was debating whether I had strength enough left to try the chain there was an echo of voices in the shaft. The racket of the pulley letting go must have roused somebody.

"Help!" I howled at the top of my lungs. "Pull up the chain!"

A few minutes later a match flared in the gray opening, a wad of burning newspaper floated down toward me. I yelled again. There were cries of astonishment as I was briefly visible before the light went out. Then, sweet music to my ears, came the steady rattle of chain being taken up. I rode out of there in style.

IN SPITE OF THE STARLESS NIGHT IT SEEMED BRIGHT AS day when I reached the top. The sound man, Walters, and Louis Taranzo, a set decorator, pulled me over to the edge and helped me out. Their cabin was closest to the well and the noise of the hoist slipping had awakened them. Needless to say they had a few questions.

"I'll tell you all about it later," I gasped. "I'm grateful, but right now I've got to see someone."

I headed for the main building, running on anger and fear. I wasn't any smarter than when I went into the well but I was a damned sight more determined. I wanted some answers, starting at the top. What was he going to do, fire me? Compared to having nearly drowned, it was a possibility I could live with.

Through the dining room, down the corridor, I slammed open the double doors and burst into Harry Bregman's quarters. And there it was, all laid out in front of me.

Several lamps were burning in the big bedroom beyond the office/sitting room. An odor of incense filled the close air. Bregman was packing. Hastily. Nadia Shaw sat in the middle of his large bed, naked to the waist, her stare as glassy as a carp's. She gave a little yelp when she saw me.

Bregman turned. His eyes and mouth widened in disbelief, telling me all I needed to know. But he recovered quickly. It seemed the time for dissembling was over.

"Hello, Bryant. You're a hard man to kill. How the hell did you get out of that well?"

"Levitation. But let's talk about your problems. Three of us was just too many, right? Paul's murder you could dodge. You might even manage to convince the authorities that Eunice's death was accidental. But not my disappearance on top of them. That was just too much to ask anyone to swallow. So it was time to cut and run."

The black cigar stub bobbed in his mouth. "Let's not b.s. each other. You're a smart boy. Worse, you're nosy. But it wasn't my idea to bump you. Would I force myself into a position where I had to flee? And now that you're here after all, I don't have to run, do I? If we can make a deal."

"Who was it?"

He shrugged. "My—ah—associate. I wasn't consulted. It was a dumb move. But we can rectify that."

"Sure," I said. "I've always wanted to be a cocaine trafficker. Is that how you've been holding the studio together? Supplying those poor devils in return for their work on your pictures? At cut-rate prices, I'll bet. Christ! I knew there were some ugly sides to the movie business but I never thought it ran this deep. So how many of them are on your string? Nadia, obviously. Who else? Parker? Mike Doyle?"

BUT EVEN AS I WAS TALKING I KNEW SOMETHING DIDN'T quite add up. My theory might be good, but the players didn't fit. I had caught Nadia going through Paul's things because she needed a hit. If she was this cozy with the big man, why would she be forced to go scrounging around for her happy snow? She could have it anytime she wanted. I glanced at her but she wasn't even in the same hemisphere.

Bregman was shaking his head. "You slay me, Bryant. I'm supposed to be a big-time drug dealer? No. All I want to do is make pictures. Sure that stuff goes on. All around me. I turn my head like everyone else. It's a fact of life."

"Then you're covering for someone. Who?"

"Me," said a soft voice behind me. Something very sharp and very cold pricked the skin just below my right ear. "Down on your knees. Quickly."

I complied, carefully. The knife followed me down. Fingers tangled in my hair, jerked my head back.

"My God, Mark! Don't!" Bregman rasped.

Mark Seldheim? Even though I was an instant away from having my throat cut, I couldn't believe it. Kind, self-effacing, devoted Mark Seldheim a killer? My mind rejected the concept but my body knew

better. It was scared.

"Haven't you done enough already?" Bregman's tone was surprisingly plaintive. "When is it going to stop? You can't do away with everyone who crosses you."

"But he knows," Mark argued from behind me.

"Yes. And I was about to offer him a deal. Don't you see? Your recklessness is pointing suspicion at me. When you told me about the fight with Oakes I understood. That could be handled. And Eunice Boyd was getting too close to our secret. I suppose she had to die. Now tonight you come in and tell me you've thrown Bryant here down the well because he was working with Eunice. That is too much. I was packing to leave, to go into hiding because of what you've done."

"I-I'm sorry." Like a small child. The fingers in my hair relaxed.

"But now we have a reprieve. My Bryant somehow is not dead. If he will see reason we may be able to salvage this mess."

"You're the supplier," I said against the edge of the knife.

"Yes, yes," Mark whispered. "And how I love to see them dance, crawl, beg. Especially this slut!" He pulled the knife away to jab it in Nadia's direction.

"And Paul was your dealer?"

"One of them, yes. In this business it pays to have a great many middlemen. Confuses the issue tremendously. But he got too smart, too demanding about quality."

"You're asking questions," Bregman said. "That means you're gonna deal?"

"Yes," I lied. "I don't have much choice, do I? What is my cooperation worth?"

"Your life for a start. Don't get pushy. Mark?"

"I don't know. How can we trust him? I think—"

Dan Dolan couldn't have done it better. I leaned back into him, caught the knife-wrist with my left hand, drove my right elbow hard into his shortribs. He grunted explosively, grappled with his left arm, and fell on top of me. We went rolling around on the floor, well-matched. He was soft but crazy; I was tired but scared.

He tried to bring the knife to bear. I held onto that arm with everything I had, ignoring the thumps, kicks, and gouges that he rained upon me. For what seemed a lifetime but couldn't have been more than a minute we struggled. Then Harry Bregman jumped in.

He immediately tried to strangle me from behind. I tucked my chin, reared up onto my knees, dragging both of them with me. I suddenly had that amazing strength people sometimes acquire under great stress. I could have picked up an icebox or hoisted the rear-end of a car.

Instead I shook Bregman from me, got an arm on each of them, hurled the two together like bowling pins colliding. They went down in a heap. Someone screamed. The fight was over.

Only Bregman got up, slowly, like an old man. Mark remained still, right hand clasped against his mid-section. A quarter-inch of knife handle protruded from his frozen grip. None of the blade was visible; it was all inside him.

When Bregman saw what had happened he cried out and knelt down, cradling the boy's head in his arms.

"He'd dead! I killed him," he groaned.

"What's going on?" Nadia mumbled from the bed.

There were hurried footsteps in the hall outside. In a moment everything would be mass confusion. I moved over, put a hand on Bregman's shoulder.

"I don't get it. All the trouble you went to, covering for him, his drug-dealing, his murders. Why?"

Harry Bregman raised red-rimmed eyes. "I had to," he said hoarsely. "He was my son."

POSTSCRIPT: ONLY ONE GOOD THING EVER CAME OUT OF my brief sojourn in Hollywood. A few months after my return to New York, I got a letter from Mike Doyle. He said he had about ninety percent of the footage for *Bullets for Blondes* in the can. Would I be averse to his trying to peddle the rights to another studio so he could finish the project? I wrote back giving him the go-ahead. In another letter just the past week he was very optimistic that it would be completed. Before long I may be able to say—

Coming soon to a theatre near you . . . ●

ANNOUNCING THE ARRIVAL
OF
Shayna Leigh

BORN ON *November 2, 1984*
WEIGHT *4 lbs 15 oz*
PARENTS *James & Livia Reasoner*

Ernie and the kid were in the music business—the way Willy Sutton had been in banking!

Music Man

by STEWART STREET

THE BATTERED GRAY VOLKSWAGEN VAN SEEMED TO make its way through the night like an injured derelict looking for shelter. It lurched past the ancient, tangled steel of the dead gas works plant, found a main avenue with its dim headlights and caught its second wind.

Behind the wheel, Ernie Follett took the last toke on a marijuana cigaret and then flipped its dregs and the roach clip out the open window. It was three more miles to Pill Hill, where all the city's hospital nurses lived and where the kid lived now. He wondered if the kid had any white, hospital stockings draped over his shower rod yet. The kid could hustle an elephant through the eye of a needle, so hustling a nurse into his bed wouldn't cause him to break a thin sweat.

Rain began to seep down. And there was almost no moon to be seen. There would be scores tonight, plenty of them. They would hit with the speed of light, move like clockwork and score like bandits.

Which was precisely what they were. Bandits.

The Kubiak kid had done three years in Juvy Detention for beating his old man to death with an old 36-ounce Louisville Slugger. The bat had been a busted discard at a semi-pro game and the kid had reconstructed it with screws, which made it weigh a ton. A county coroner said the kid's father had a blood alcohol reading of .25. A county social case worker testified he also had a long history of parental abuse. Nearly everyone concerned conveyed surprise he had not been killed by someone years earlier.

Because the killing had happened in the Kubiak kitchen and the baseball bat was known to be kept in the kid's bedroom, there was evidence of the strongest kind to suggest, if not support, premeditated murder. The kid could point to no fresh bruises or cuts and the count of contusions found on the father's head and upper torso numbered over fifty and so the conviction for manslaughter was expected. But the court wanted only to get him out of the battle zone so his psychological scars could have time to heal.

Follett ran into the Kubiak kid six months after his release from Juvy Hall Detention. He was a little grunt of a squirt, who pulled Follett away from a pool table in the Paradise Tavern to sound him out on the possible purchase of a .32-caliber 1906 Savage automatic.

Three hours before, Follett had spotted the kid eying the menu board at the Paradise lunch counter. Follett could almost hear the kid's stomach growling the sixty feet to the pool tables. The kid checked a fistful of small change and then left the Paradise as Follett was setting up a delicate cross-rail shot. For an instant their eyes hooked and caught. Follett suspected his held idle curiosity. The kid's eyes were less uncommitted. In them Follett read hunger, desperation and purpose.

"Where'd you get it?" Follett had inquired, leaning against a towel dispenser in the men's john. "A dime and a boxtop to Battle Creek, Michigan?"

The kid's eyes flared with contention at being regarded as a toddler who should have been home eating his cornflakes.

"I picked a Mercedes over on Huron Avenue and popped the glove box. If I'd wanted, I could have waltzed off with the whole damn machine."

"A pro *would have*," Follett told him. "You, on the other hand, just ripped off an item for which there is a very small market. Guns are bad business."

"Come *on*. Everybody needs a gun."

"I don't. Take some good advice, kid. Throw that thing off a bridge, or put it back."

"It's probably worth a hundred bucks."

"And it's probably registered. And it probably will be missed. And then looked for. I've got a pool game out there to cash in on. Thanks for the use of the hall."

At sunset, when Ernie Follett had fleeced as many of the Paradise's hustlable as he could and reboxed his cue, the kid was hiked up on a stool at the lunchcounter, with a fistful of hamburger and a side of fries. He flashed Follett a street-wise little smile that said there was now another gun out on the boulevard.

FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS, THE KID WAS IN AND OUT of the Paradise as refuge. The word on him was that he lifted jackets and coats in the downtown cafeterias, rifled parking meters, popped car trunks in the parking garages, even scrambled for small change in the pay toilets in the downtown public library. It was also rumored that he had a hell of a memory, that in his brain was housed an infallible computer to keep the random crimes from falling into any discernible pattern. Plainly put, the kid had total recall.

Follett felt he could use someone like that in his own work, which at the moment happened to be car stereo thefts. As a one-man operation, his nerves were being tried to their limits. He needed a driver and a look-out and someone who could keep perfect track of neighborhoods and streets and give a warning sign whenever Follett's movements and actions were beginning to slip into dangerous patterns. Right now, it was all hit-and-miss, all impulse and opportunity. Follett couldn't even clearly recall where he'd prowled *yesterday*. He could feel the risk building way beyond safe proportions.

So taking on the kid looked like a sound business decision, which Follett presented him on another evening at the Paradise as the kid stood at a Pac-Man video and scrambled for energy cells.

"I could use someone like you in my business, someone to do the driving and stand look-out. And some dude with a good memory like yours."

"I *got* a job," said Milo Kubiak, as he registered five more free games on a game he'd been manipulating for a half-hour on a single quarter. "I do the streets, or haven't you heard?"

"You boost ratty coats in cafeterias and two-bit neckties in the department stores," said Follett, coloring his tone of voice with a thin sneer to show the kid what he thought of street boosting and people who had to jimmy pay toilets to keep a roof over their heads. "And you don't even have a regular fence, which means one of these fine days you're going to sell to a cop and then you'll be taking your meals off a tin tray stamped STATE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS on the bottom."

"I been inside," said the kid, with plenty of bravado. "I can stand the time."

"Juvy," corrected Follett. "That's like having a picnic on the grass and feeding the ducks. I'm talking about *hard time,* which is what you'll do from here on out."

"So what makes you think I'll do less of it if I throw in with *you*?"

"Because I have an *operation,* not the hand-to-mouth, hit-and-run cartoon you're playing in. I need someone to keep records and leave a

little rubber when I yell drive and play watchdog from time to time."

The kid's eyes hooded. He was unschooled, but he was no dope. Likely, it was crossing his brain that this seemed like an awful lot of hats to wear for perhaps not a lot of financial remuneration.

"What kind of money are we talking about?"

"Well," Follett began, "I've been netting a $500-a-night for the last three months or so."

Follett watched with pleasure when the kid's eyes danced a little jig at the mention of that figure.

"I can see my way clear to cut you in for ten per-cent of the gross," Follett offered.

"Gross? What happened to all this net-business you were throwing around earlier?"

"I incur certain expenses and they have to come off the top,"Follett explained, not pleased that the kid was paying more attention to the face of his wristwatch than he was to Follett's words. "Gas, oil, depreciation on my car. Maintenance and replacement of tools. And I find it's necessary to wine and dine my customers every so often to keep me high on their list of favored suppliers. It all adds up."

The display screen on the video had gone black from the kid's lack of activity. It didn't seem to bother him. He had enough free games rung up to treat a troop of Boy Scouts.

"It adds up, yeah," the kid finally said. "Thing of it is, I don't see why it has to add up on my side of the ledger. Tell you what, though. If you take care of your expenses, I'll take care of mine."

The kid might have been born on the shady side of the street. But he had not been born yesterday. He played off a fresh game and replaced his fingertips on the video game's controls. Follett could see he would have to make some revision in his terms if he was to regain the kid's undivided attention.

"Okay, ten per-cent of the net."

"Net has a much nicer ring to it than gross." The kid found it impossible to suppress a little smile over the way the negotiations had gone. "Fifty bucks a night. How many nights a week do we work?"

"Seven," said Follett.

"No time off for bad behavior, huh? Your . . . *operation* . . . must have something to do with striking while the iron is hot. Why is that?"

"It's the same old story, kid. Technology and crime are in a race for supremacy. And eventually, technology will catch up."

It seemed they had reached not only a partnership agreement, but the point where Follett owed the Kubiak kid a full explanation of the type of enterprise in which he was currently engaged.

"Auto stereo-radio and tape decks," he told the kid. "But only the top of the line merchandise. Cheap sound systems don't move and the fences want fast, attractive turnover."

"Like Pioneers, Kenwoods and Blaupunkts," said the Kubiak kid, wanting Follett to know the range of his knowledge went a bit beyond the next street corner.

"And a few pricey others," Follett said. "Selectivity, that's the key here. The Daffy Duck stuff won't bring in enough to make you jingle when you walk. You got a notepad and something to write with, kid?"

At that. Follett saw the kid's eyes react with what he sensed was both anger and shame. "You didn't tell me I had to take a test for this."

"No test. It's for keeping track of where we hit, so the puke robbery-burglary detectives can't fit us into any pattern."

A residue of the anger and the shame still displayed themselves to Follett. "You may as well know, because it ain't no federal offense or anything, but I can't read or write."

"Come on," said Follett, hardly believing that statement to be at all credible.

"I only went as far as the eighth grade and then hit it on down the road."

"But you must have learned to read and write *somewhere* down the line," said a fairly astonished Follett.

"You don't learn to read and write when they dump you in adjustment classes and give you some bird called a Differential Guidance Counselor. You fingerpaint and make clay ashtrays and wait for Mrs. Parmenter to turn her back on you. We was the slow learners, the village idiots and the kids who tried to burn down the school."

"What did you do time in Juvy Hall for?"

"I beat my old man to death with a baseball bat," the kid said, looking no worse for wear by saying it than if he'd just announced he was going down to the corner for a quart of milk and some eggs. "I don't really want to talk about that, if it's all the same to you. Let's just say I had the trademark up all the time I was swinging and leave it at that."

"Consider it left," Follett told him, knowing enough about hornets' nests to know you didn't whack them like pinatas unless you sought trouble.

But the kid, it turned out, had a ready alternative for his lack of literacy. "If it's record-keeping you want, people say I got a pretty good memory. Idiot-savant was what some public school system shrink called me back when I was making my clay ashtrays and filling school lockers with water through the air louvers."

Follett asked the Kubiak kid for a sample of his savant memory. A broad grin broke out on the kid's face. He ticked off the Nixon cabinet and supreme court, every New York first baseman to wear Yankee pinstripes (including Fenton Mole) and the entire Rolling Stones songbook from *Ain't Too Proud To Beg* to *You Got the Silver* and then leaned back and let the grin turn to smug self-satisfaction.

"Think you could remember all the neighborhoods and streets we work and what day we worked them?"

"Does a snake get grass stains on his belly?" the kid said.

"And can you drive a turbo, fuel-injected Trans-Am?"

"I can wheel anything I break into and that includes the foreign jobs nobody can pronounce."

AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK, THEY LEFT THE PARADISE AND walked six blocks up Yankee Avenue to the Jade Pagoda. Follett stood the kid to an order of Chinese barbequed pork and a dish of noodles and then they nursed a pot of tea at a window booth and waited for the night to die down.

"You feel sorry that you killed your old man?"

"Hadn't been me, it would have been someone else. Yeah, somebody would have jobbed that bastard somewhere down the line. See, he enjoyed picking on people, usually people who couldn't put up no defense. Small people, stupid people, old people, women. Sooner or later, he would have read one of them wrong. I just saved him the embarrassment."

"You don't have any brothers or sisters?" Follett asked.

"He always said I was his second mistake after marrying my mother, so he wasn't about to step in it and make a third."

"You live with your mother, then?"

The smile turned wry and just a bit tragic. "She met a navy chief in a penny arcade. He won her a furry monkey and they got married the next morning. Last I heard, they were living in San Diego in a room filled with furry monkeys, satin pillows and gin bottles."

"You got a room someplace?" Follett asked. "An apartment, something like that?"

"I keep myself warm and dry."

That told Follett the kid had moveable lodgings: the bus depot, the all-night laundramats, the perpetually running porn movie houses. Prince of the Streets. Follett put aside his pity for him. Likely, the kid made out better than any packless, homeless jungle animal and got into fewer scrapes. The city could be a very fruitful lifeline if you knew how to plug it in and keep the plasma flowing.

Follett looked at his watch. It was nearly one a.m. He fished a ring of keys from his jacket pocket and slid them across the slick, red formica.

"Time to go shopping," he said, as he slid from the booth and snatched up the check.

FOR THE NEXT FOUR HOURS THEY CRISS-CROSSED THE city, the darkness both their ally and their shield. Under the kid's light hands, the Trans-Am was a machine without wasted motion. He seemed born with a sense of the passage of time, could instinctively *feel* when Follett had jimmied a lock and pulled a stereo unit and was about to roll out with it cradled in his arms. There he would be, quietly moving the black Trans-Am up from his look-out a pure one hundred feet away, the passenger door already swung open and the seat pushed forward so Follett could deposit the unit in the back seat and dive into the front nearly in a single motion.

By four-thirty, they had seven units, six speakers, sixty tape cassettes and a $350 radar detection unit tossed in for good measure.

"Where to now?" the kid breezed to Follett.

"You know Industrial Avenue, two blocks off Stadium Way?"

"Near the sports dome?"

"That's the one."

"What's down there? Half them warehouses are leaning against each other just to stay upright."

"Well, one of them isn't so upstanding," said Follett.

"Your supplier," the kid guessed.

"Outside it says Johnson-Lieber Industrial Cleaners-Sealers-Protectants. But Otto Lieber has taken to dabbling in sound systems.

"So we're all in the music business," said Milo Kubiak. "And you're the Music Man."

"We're just maximizing our abilities. Willy Sutton did banks, we do sound systems."

They fell silent then as the kid moved them into the heart of the city. When they were cruising into Stadium Way, he said to Follett, "That Audi. The one parked on Fauntleroy near the pocket park."

"What about it?" Follett said, already warming to the kid's anticipated question.

"It looked ripe. Poor street lighting, not another car parked for half a block."

Follett reached into a jacket pocket and brought out the small, black detection unit that was scarcely the size of a two-buck transistor radio. "That Audi had an audio discriminator unit. And this is an ADD-214. Top of the line."

"Audio Discriminator *Detector,*" said the kid, catching on.

"I haven't learned how to locate and bypass them yet," Follett told him, "but this little baby tells me the guy's got one installed and listening for a convertible top being ripped, or a window being tapped, or a door lock being picked."

"Then all hell busts loose," the kid said.

"Lights, horns, sirens. World War II with the original cast."

"I guess there's plenty of foreign jobs around. Why ask for trouble?"

"Your apprenticeship is filling out nicely," Follett told him.

The produce trucks were already moving up and down Industrial Avenue in the half-light of dawn. At Follett's instructions, Milo Kubiak wheeled the Trans-Am up to the double garage doors that were designated as the ramshackled receiving area for Johnson-Lieber. Two short blasts of the horn caused both doors to swing open. A squat little man wearing the hustler's mismatched red vest and garish yellow necktie motioned Follett and the Trans-Am inside.

"Sharp dresser, this Lieber," the kid said.

"He's a weasel, but he pays C.O.D. I sell to him. I don't have to dance with him or take him home to meet my mother."

BY THE END OF THE FOLLOWING WEEK, THEY'D TURNED over seventy stereo units and accessories. The kid's end was four hundred dollars and change and he couldn't have been more delighted if he'd been a bear who'd just tripped over a log and fallen into a lake filled with honey.

"If Horatio Alger didn't start this way," he told Follett, "he was definitely in the wrong racket. You make this kind of bread *every* week?

"The work ethic, kid. You get out of it what you put into it. Just think of it as being like we just won a five-hour grocery grab in a radio contest. Somebody blows a whistle and off we go, tearing around the store, up and down the aisles, tossing stuff into the carts. The harder and faster we work, the longer that receipt will be at the checkstand."

"Guys like us, we got to work the streets for all they're worth," said the kid now, summing up in one quick philosophical burst what Follett had felt and known for over ten years. "We got to, because nobody gives us a chance to go straight. We got records for crimes and we ain't got families and everybody looks at us sideways when we walk down the street just *waiting* for us to cross over to the shady side. The streets is all we got, Ernie."

There was a look that passed between them then, the sensing of a

wavelength met or a kinship discovered. Follett felt what was almost like a brotherly warmth for this hard-as-nails little refugee who still had years left on him to be riding his ten-speed in the park, or meeting young girls on the beach, or identifying birds and flowers with his classmates on school field trips.

"I almost feel like I got me an older brother to look out for me," the kid said.

Ernie Follett felt his cheeks flush with embarrassment. In all his mean years and shabby dealings, this was the closest thing to pure sentiment he'd ever had directed at him by another human being. "Yeah, well maybe you do at that," Follett managed finally. "Everybody ought to have somebody older to teach them the ropes, stand up for them when it's blood-time."

"We going to the Jade Pagoda for some pan-stickers and noodles before we go to work tonight, Ernie?"

"Kid," Follett said, cuffing Milo Kubiak around the neck playfully, "does Charlie Chan buy his suits in Hong Kong?"

IT WASN'T UNTIL TWO WEEKS LATER THAT FOLLETT GOT the chance to tell the kid about his running feud with the judge. The local newspapers had called attention to an International Law and Justice Conference in Los Angeles and the name of Judge Rostow popped up in it as one of the conferees and key speakers. There was a better than even chance they would find his silver Jaguar customarily parked on the fifth level of the airport's parking garage and that was a golden temptation Follett could not resist without at least one drive-through.

"So how come this Judge Rostow is a pet project?" the kid wanted to know as they sped on their way to the airport that night. "Musta sent you up for something."

"Breaking and entering," said Follett. "With intent to rob. That was six years ago. When I was doing residences."

"First offense?"

"First time *caught* being offensive," said Follett. "But Rostow is a hanging judge and the year was ripe for deadly justice. The determinate sentencing statutes allowed he could have suspended the sentence and probated me."

"If he'd been a fair-minded man," said the kid.

"The new county jail was just getting its last coat of paint. And Rostow was already angry about his long hours on the bench, his low pay and esteem and revolving-door justice. But Maximum Gordon Rostow, well, he was in a position to do something assertive about all

of that. So he recommended to the State Board of Prisons the maximum five years, which meant the state was bound by conscience and protocol to deal me the minimum two. That's what I got."

"When I came up for the sentencing, Judge Rostow didn't mince too many words about how high he wanted me hanged. In my case, he said, he only wished he could be judge, jury and jailer, so he could *decide* I should be put away, *rule* I be put away and then lose the key so I'd *stay* put away."

"Sounds like he had more against you than just busting into residences," said the kid.

"Naw, it was nothing personal. He just hates all street criminals, 'cause we're riff-raff and low-grade thieves and we haven't got known addresses and junk piled up like that. We're all habituals, as far as he's concerned."

"We're taking a trip out to the airport to prove just how habitual we can be," the kid anticipated now. "We're going to lift the stereo equipment out of that Jag of his."

Follett slipped the kid a grin through the darkness as he wheeled the Trans-Am onto road shoulder to let him take over as their driver. "Does a one-legged chicken go in circles?" he said.

On the fifth level of the airport's parking garage, they found the judge's Jaguar parked precisely where it had been the first time Follett had worked it over, its vanity license plate, "DE JUDGE" identifying its owner beyond any question.

"Memorize what it looks like, kid. Because every time we see it, his stereo gear is mine."

"How many times you hit him?"

"This makes two," said Follett. "But the grief is only beginning for this guy. Keep that engine revving, kid, while I hit the old midnight market."

During the scant three minutes it took Follett to pop the door lock on the silver Jaguar and remove the $800 Blaupunkt from the dashboard, no one intruded onto the scene of their theft. While he worked, Follett wondered just how many theft claims the judge would be allowed to submit to his insurance company before they pulled the plug on his coverage. Not soon, Follett hoped. He was loving the game—the stealth, the risk, the revenge—all of it.

In the morning he would send another cryptic postcard to the County Courts Building, addressed to the judge, a card whose message he was already forming in his brain: *We are the people our parents warned us about.* It would be signed *The Music Man, Your Neighborhood Habitual.*

Ten minutes later, the kid was wheeling them down an unemcumbered freeway towards the lights and spires of the city.

"Well, Ernie, where to now? It's still the shank of the evening and there's lotsa idle electronics out there."

"Where to? *You* tell *me,* Mr. Memory. Where have we hit in the last week or so?"

As easily as a bright child reciting the alphabet, the kid intoned, "Arbor Heights, on Rainier Avenue South near that pocket park, that ritzy Blue Ridge section across The Wash, Broadmoor, parking lot of the Turf Club Lounge out near the race track . . ."

"What about Magnolia Village?" said Follett. "With all those condos?"

"We were *near* there, Ernie. A few blocks. But not around any of the condos."

"So what do you think?"

"Safe enough," the kid said. "If we stay to the west side of those high-rises. Dearborn Street, Chesterfield Street, Carlyle Avenue. Any of those."

Follett nodded and knitted his hands behind his head. "Well then, let's let tender be the night, kid. *Legal* tender!"

IN HIS APARTMENT UNIT ON BELMONT STREET ON PILL Hill, Milo Kubiak finished off the last of his home-cooked plate of franks and beans and thought warmly about how dramatically his life had turned around. His entire late-adolescence had been spent as a street thief, an existence of no distinction and even less financial assurance or safety. He had slept in doorways and packing cartons and had taken his meals from trash bins and from dumpsters outside the back doors of Chinese restaurants.

But now, in one sudden and unexpected turn, he had money in his pocket and in the bank and he was cooking his own meal in his own kitchen in his own home. And it was Ernie Follett who'd done all that for him and whether it had been done out of kindness or out of purely professional need, Kubiak owed him a debt he could only make feeble attempts to repay. Savior, brother, business partner, friend—Ernie Follett was all of these to him and so much more.

And now they were linked in another way. They had a mutual enemy in Judge Rostow, someone they could torment purely for sport to relieve the tensions and pressures of thieving.

And in time, Kubiak had even compiled bits and pieces of a third-hand biography on Rostow, a process very much like the gradual emergence of a darkroom photograph as liquid chemicals slowly

brought up an image onto paper.

What was revealed was a picture of a maverick judge with his own unorthodox justice, a man thoroughly despised by defense lawyers and adored by the police. The County Bar Association annually ranked him well below most of the twenty-two Municipal and County District Court judges in such judicial areas as legal understanding, court conduct and the facility to resolve legal issues. He was notorious for sneering at cases that dragged on interminably and for exhibiting something like absolute glee at making quick decisions and for tossing out evidence and testimony he thought inadmissable or just plain lengthy or roundabout. In a gaggle of gliding beauties, he was one queer duck.

Rostow was, indeed, a legitimate law school graduate, with additional degrees in history and political science, but that seemed to be where any orthodoxy last rubbed elbows with him. He was thrice-divorced, he dated women one-third his age, he grew artichokes in his halide-lit basement, and he jogged five miles every morning in a pair of ragged, ten-year-old high-top basketball shoes and whatever clothing he had worn home the evening before.

Which served to mean just one thing: he was unpredictable. And that meant the threat of him was more real than imagined.

At midnight, Kubiak roused himself from his two-hour nap. With the moon still in a quarter-phase, they had been doing good business. But the amount of girth it showed to the sun grew each evening now and moonlight was their enemy. In another month, they would have to shut down the operation for a while.

Ernie Follett would be by to pick him up at twelve-thirty. Kubiak made a pot of strong coffee and jumped into the shower.

"READY FOR THE NIGHT-SHIFT, KID?"

"Do they serve up beans in Boston?"

Ernie Follett had traded the Trans-Am back to Otto Lieber for a well-worn Volkswagen Vanagon. Every three weeks or so—depending upon what Lieber had in stock, Follett traded up or down so that they could get a new vehicle onto the streets. You did business from the same stand for too long, Follett had told Kubiak, and before long everyone knew your name.

The kid took the wheel and toured the streets indiscriminately, getting a feel for the van's five-speed stick shift and its sluggish steering. Occasionally, he let his eyeballs slide to the corners of his eyes for approval of his driving from Follett, as a younger brother might seek an older brother's approval of his curveball as they played catch in

the family driveway. Strangely, or perhaps not so, Follett's approval had become very important to him, and he sought it as though it were something that could satiate a deep and long-felt hunger.

"So, kid," Ernie Follett asked, when Milo Kubiak had the van shaken down and under his impeccable control, "where we shopping tonight?"

In the darkness, Follett could almost hear the kid's brain giving off its whirs and beeps and sparks as it began to compute.

"Brittany Park, Balfour Hills, Quincy, all the north suburban Metro Transit park-and-ride lots . . ."

"Doesn't the judge have a little something going for him at one of those park-and-rides?" Follett said.

"Little blonde nymphet from Traffic Violations Division," computed the kid's memory bank without missing a beat. "She was his hideaway mistress before the last wife left him. He was paying the rent on her Brittany Park apartment. He'd meet her at the park-and-ride lot, leave his Jag there to put off the wife and drive to the apartment in her car. See, the wife had hired a P.I., but the judge knew that and was careful not to leave him any tracks beyond the park-and-ride. All the rigmarole is academic now that the wife is out of the picture, but the judge and the nymphet still use the same arrangement out of habit."

"So should we put the Brittany Park park-and-ride lot on our shopping list?" asked Follett.

"Couldn't hurt," the kid said. "And we could get lucky."

"Not out of our way, do you think?"

"When we're dragging down eight-to-ten bills a night," the kid shot back, "only place that's out of our way is the far side of the moon."

THEY ROLLED QUIETLY INTO THE BRITTANY PARK METRO Transit park-and-ride lot at a little after three a.m., the van already loaded to the gills with prime electronic loot. A narrow slice of moon cast down dull, indifferent light. Tall, ancient firs ringed the cloistered, asphalt lot on three sides, heightening what the kid already felt as an acute sense of safety and isolation. The county skimped on mercury vapor lighting. Only four of them, set atop thin, aluminum standards. The light they shed was thin and sadly anemic.

They were approaching via a freeway off-ramp overpass. Milo Kubiak had a bird's eye view of the lot as he moved the van along the overpass. The lot held only four automobiles, each parked distantly from the next, like four solitary souls reading books in a library, their private territory staked out at separate tables.

And one of the cars was a Jaguar.

A serpentine road led down to the lot. The kid's palm began to sweat against the sterring wheel. A score, they were going to make a score.

"A Jag," he whispered to Ernie Follett next to him, as though to raise his voice might make the Jaguar vaporize into thin air and disappear.

"I see it. The judge's?"

"No. His is silver. This one's black."

"Well," breezed Follett, "any Blaupunkt in a storm . . ."

Milo Kubiak rolled the van into a parking slot behind the black Jaguar roughly thirty feet away, killed the motor and doused the lights. Ernie Follett plunged into the back of the van and began getting his equipment together.

"Five minutes, kid," he said over his shoulder. "Jags are easy meat."

And then Milo Kubiak was listening to the van's side-door being slid open and, a moment later, saw Ernie Follett's darkly clad form flash into the corner of his left eye. Already, the lock-picks were in his hand. To Follett there wasn't much that was wasted motion.

And then Milo Kubiak's sense of idyllic rightness with everything began to crumble around the edges, like an old sandstone building whose foundation had been too long battered by time and nature's elements. He sensed the wrongness to have something to do with the car, with the black Jaguar whose doorlock Ernie Follett was even how kneeling beside with his lock picks. It was like a face from a past school yearbook he now stood staring at thirty years later, a face to which he could not put a name or fix in time and place.

Follett was working the lock now.

The kid's infallible memory was feeding data to him now at a rate that would put any high-tech computer to shame. It was displaying to him a 2°-degree tilt to the left-rear of a silver Jaguar where a rear shock was weakened and a small, penny-sized dent just below its left tail-light-and a judge with a retributive leer on his face, issuing sudden justice from the bench.

Follett was removing his picks from the Jag's door-lock now.

The kid's heart turned to a block of ice. This was the same park-and-ride lot where Judge Rostow still met his little blonde nmyphet for his ride to her apartment, the maverick judge who could be so unpredictable, clocks cringed to be set by him.

Follett's hand was reaching for the door handle now.

The kid trained the van's spotlight on the black Jaguar and turned it on. Illuminated beyond any doubt was the penny-sized dent below the tail-light and the slight lean of its carriage. The kid's cold heart stopped

its beating. This was the judge's silver Jag repainted black.

And the vanity license plate didn't read DE JUDGE now. One by one, the kid deciphered the new letters on the new plate.

They said KA BOOM.

Ernie Follett was turning the Jag's door handle now, in the same instant that the kid pressed down on the van's horn with all his strength. For a moment the horn's blaring shared the quiet night with no other sound. And then its identity became lost in the suddering din of the explosion.

And then the noise of the horn could be heard again, with the smoke and fire dying down and the kid laying on the horn with both hands and Ernie Follett nowhere to be seen, as though he'd stepped off the edge of the earth and disappeared . . . ●

RETAIL DISPLAY ALLOWANCE

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Well, of course, she wasn't really a princess from another planet who killed people by magic. And yet, people were dying and disappearing . . .

The Charm Bracelet

by JOSEPH A. SEKELSKY

EDWARD ROGERS LOOKED FORWARD TO HIS FIRST COUNseling session with Regina Becquerel with anticipation usually reserved for a flu shot. Never had a student become so notorious in so short a time. The stories the sixth-grade teachers told in the faculty lounge about her bizarre behavior convinced Edward that Regina would be his greatest challenge. As a first-year counselor hired by a four-to-three vote of the school board, he realized his contract renewal depended upon his performance. Or as Mr. Mauser, his principal, so quaintly put it, "Want to travel, meet new people, start a new career? Screw up once, kid."

Edward bent over uncomfortably at the drinking fountain, a bit too low for his six-foot height. He stood, tilted his head back slightly, and allowed the water to slosh about in his mouth before he swallowed.

Melvin Johnson walked past, holding the wooden paddle that served as a bathroom pass.

"Hi," he said, and waved the paddle.

"Hi," Edwards answered, and returned the wave.

Melvin was the largest boy in the sixth grade. His mental and social development, however, had not kept pace with his physical development. As a result, he attempted to bully most of the other sixth-grade students. Edward had already met once with Melvin, a session roughly equivalent to attempting to conduct a discussion with a baseball bat about the morality of clubbing baby seals.

Edwards walked back to his office. He sat on the unpadded wooden chair and tried to open the middle drawer of his desk. On the third tug it finally opened. He reached in and took out an unsharpened pencil. He looked up suddenly as he heard the sound of footsteps.

Mr. Mauser walked through the open door of the office and slapped a pink slip of paper, a discipline notice, on the desk. "Mr. Rogers, this is Regina Becquerel," he said as he pointed to a slender five-foot tall girl standing in the doorway. She shuffled forward, peering through thick lenses at the scuffed toes of her clogs.

Mr. Mauser winked at Edward. "Earn your money," he said. He turned and walked out of the office, closing the door as he left.

ALTHOUGH EDWARD HAD OFTEN SEEN REGINA IN THE hall during the first two weeks of school, this was the first time he had really looked closely at her. Everything about her was a contrast. Her stringy blonde hair looked as if half of it was combed on alternate days, her skirt was too long, her blouse sleeves were too short, and her socks were two distinctively different shades of green. Edward looked critically at his own socks, slacks, and suit, believing for a moment that he, not she, was wrong.

Edward offered her a chair near his desk. She sat quietly, looking blankly at the floor.

Edward noted a pecular odor about her. It was not the odor of the unwashed he had expected. It was, instead, the odor of the unwashed masked by the scent of an inexpensive but potent perfume. He would have preferred the unwashed odor.

Edward began to read the discipline notice. It was signed by Mrs. Wolington, an elderly teacher who had already sent several students to Edward for minor rule violations. She seemed to think a visit to the counselor's office was the most severe punishment available. In this case Regina had drawn a picture of a horse instead of doing her assignment.

"Regina, do you like horses?" Edward asked, hoping to begin on a positive note.

Her eyes seemed to open wider and she looked at him for the first time. Her mouth opened to reveal a broad smile of crooked teeth.

"Yes!" she replied. "I really do!"

"Do you own a horse?" he asked.

"No," she answered and looked at the floor again. "I would have a lot of horses if my father was alive."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know your father was dead."

"He was a king," she continued, "and kings have a lot of horses."

Edward was not surprised. The stories he had heard in the lounge, he thought, prepared him for anything she might say. "Your father was a king?" he asked.

"And I would someday be queen," she continued. "Then I'd have lots of horses." She leaned forward and looked through the window at the sky.

The lone window in the counseling office was equivalent in size to a bathroom mirror and provided neither a satisfying view of the sky nor ventilation adequate for late August heat.

"Where was your kingdom?" Edward asked.

She quickly glanced at the closed door. "I can't tell you," she replied.

"Why not?"

"Because the people revolted. They killed my father and mother."

Edward was becoming capable of being surprised. "How did you escape?" he asked.

"I can't tell you that either. They might find me."

"But Regina, everything you tell me is a secret. I won't tell anyone." He attempted to establish eye contact with her, but her eyes continually darted about the room, as if she expected hired assassins to spring from the walls at any moment.

"No!" she said. "They'll torture you." She stopped moving her head and stared directly at him. "Or give you truth serum."

Edward picked up the unsharpened pencil and rubbed the eraser on his forehead as he paused to consider a reply. He certainly had no immunity to truth serum; nor to torture for that matter.

Suddenly Regina raised her left arm. Edward could not believe he had missed noticing it before. On her wrist was a huge bracelet, much too large for her slender arm. It was a bright golden color. As she waved it in front of his eyes, it reflected a blinding beam of sunlight from the window. A single charm, a golden king, hung from the bracelet.

"That's a beautiful bracelet," Edward said, thankful for an opportunity to change the subject.

"My father gave it to me," she replied. "It proves I am the rightful queen. Someday like Jason I will return to claim my throne."

For an instant Edward thought he could believe her. Then the bell rang signalling the end of the period.

"Regina," he said, "I think you should go to your next class. I'll check your schedule and see you again during a study period."

She skipped to the door rather gracefully considering the oversized clogs she wore. She paused to wave and smile at him. "Super," she said.

Edward rose and walked to the file cabinet in the corner of his office near the window. He opened the top drawer and withdrew the manila folder labeled "Becquerel, Regina Virginia." He placed the folder on his desk and opened it.

Her cumulative file contained very little useful information. She was an only child and lived with her mother. Her father was dead; at least she hadn't made that up. She had transferred from another school at the end of the previous school year. Her records had been requested but never received.

AT THEIR NEXT SESSION EDWARD DECIDED TO DEAL WITH difficulties Regina was experiencing with Mrs. Wolington. Although it was now September, the day was as hot and humid as any Edward could remember from August. Sweaty and tired, he hoped something would happen to prevent him from conducting this session. Regina, on the other hand, arrived wide-eyed and smiling, apparently anxious to talk with him.

"You seem to have a problem with your English class," he began, deciding to face the problem immediately.

"I don't have any problems," she replied and looked past him at the window.

"According to Mrs. Wolington, you have not been completing your assignments," he said.

"Mrs. Wolington's an old bear!" she interrupted.

"An old bear?" Edward questioned. He was surprised again.

"Everyone on this planet is an animal," she answered. "And she's an old bear."

"What do you mean by this planet?" Edward asked, but she ignored the question.

As Regina stood up she picked up a ruler from the desk. She tilted her head back, as if attempting to see through bifocals.

"Nouns, verbs, growl, growl. Sentences, phrases, growl, growl," she said and pounded the desk with the ruler.

From observing Mrs. Wolington's classes Edward knew Regina's performance contained more fact than fiction. "Do you think Mrs. Wolington is unfair to you?" he asked.

"It doesn't matter," she answered. "Winter is coming. She'll soon be hibernating."

She waved her left arm in front of his eyes. He noticed the bracelet now held two charms. The new one, slightly deformed, appeared to be a bear.

"You have a new charm," he said.

"I've always had these," she answered.

"Regina, you did not have that bear the last time I talked to you."

She stood up. "I quit!" she said and strode through the door.

Edward rose and followed her, holding her blue study hall pass in his hand. She walked through the hall, down the stairs, and into the study hall without looking back. She sat quietly in her seat at the front. Edward handed the pass to the teacher on duty, explaining Regina had forgotten it.

THE NEXT MORNING EDWARD MET MR. MAUSER IN THE hall. Mr. Mauser was obviously upset. He slouched. Usually, he walked as if he was trying to stretch himself beyond his five-foot-nine inch height. "Mrs. Wolington died last night," he began.

"Died!" Edward exclaimed. "How!"

"Fell over the railing of her second-floor porch. Skull fracture, broken neck. Neighbor found her this morning. I always worried something would happen. You know, widow living alone, not well . . . "

Edward wasn't paying attention to him. He was watching Regina walk past them. She smiled and waved. With her left arm. The arm wearing the bracelet. Winter is coming, he thought. She'll soon be hibernating.

That afternoon Edward dialed the number listed in Regina's cumulative file. Following the third ring, a woman's voice answered.

"Hello."

"Hello," Edward responded. "Mrs. Becquerel?"

"Right," the voice answered.

"This is Edward Rogers, the guidance counselor . . . "

"I've heard of you," she interrupted him.

Edward was tempted to ask what she had heard of him. Instead, he said, "I'm calling to discuss Regina's problems."

"Problems, what problems?" she asked and her voice became louder.

"Well, for one thing, she is failing all of her classes because she has

so many incomplete assignments. Another thing, the way she acts and the way she dresses causes problems with the other students."

"You don't seem to realize how special my Regina is," Mrs. Becquerel said. "She is very creative and sensitive. That's why people hurt her. She should be protected, not punished." By now Mrs. Becquerel was nearly shouting.

"Please listen," said Edward. "I don't want to punish your Regina. I want to protect her, too."

There were a few seconds of silence on the line. Then Mrs. Becquerel spoke. "Oh, that's nice," she said softly.

"What I think we can do," said Edward, seizing the opportunity to make his point, "is work together to protect her. We'll both encourage her to complete her assignments. I'll check her schedule to be sure she is not late for any classes. You might set out her clothes the night before, check that she takes a bath, and so on."

"That's nice that you're going to protect Regina," said Mrs. Becquerel.

Edward thanked her for her time and cooperation. She told him one more time how nice it was; they both said goodbye and hung up.

REGINA CAME SMILING TO THEIR NEXT SESSION. THE SKY was cloudy, and a cool breeze blew through the tiny window. Regina's appearance was as refreshing a change as the breeze. Her hair was neatly combed. She wore reasonably clean tennis shoes, slightly faded jeans, and a blue blouse, possibly new, that seemed to match them. Even her socks matched. She sat down and began to talk even before Edward had a chance to initial her pass.

"My aunt said you talked to her," she began.

"I talked to your mother," Edward corrected her.

"She's not really my mother. She adopted me when my parents were killed."

"I know your father is dead," Edward replied, "but the records said that she is your natural mother."

"I know," Regina replied. "She tried to make me believe that, too."

"Is she your mother's sister or your father's sister?" Edward asked. Maybe playing the game would move things along.

"Neither. I just call her Auntie. I think she was one of the parents' loyal servants. You know she has an extra toe on her left foot? All servants have extra toes where we come from."

"Where is that?" Edward interrupted.

"She probably saved my life," she continued, ignoring his question. "But please don't tell anyone. Even," she added after a pause, "if they

torture you."

"I won't," he promised and placed his index finger over his lips. "Is that a new blouse?"

"Oh, this?" she laughed. "Just an old rag I found around the house."

The rest of the session progressed in a sensible direction. They discussed proper dress, hygiene, and the development of a routine that would enable her to be at each class on time. By the end of the session Edward was confident he had begun to establish the necessary rapport with Regina. She seemed to trust him.

FOR SEVERAL WEEKS REGINA FUNCTIONED WELL. MOST of her assignments were completed. Although her grades were never spectacular, she usually earned a C. She was not tardy for any class. As her appearance improved, at least to the level of the typical sixth grader, her relations with the other students improved. Few students bothered to tease her now. Although most simply ignored her, some did become friendly. For example, Debbie Roberts and Michele Overton, two of the more mature sixth-grade girls, often sat with her in the lunchroom or walked with her to class.

During this time Edward's sessions with Regina seemed to be sensible, not really different from his sessions with other students. There were, however, still occasions when Regina seemed to drift back to her fantasy world.

For example, on one occasion Edward praised Regina for completing her assignments. He pointed out, however, that she had failed to hand in one paper for Mr. Becker's mathematics class.

"You married?" Regina asked him.

"Why, no," he answered, sure that she must have known already. "Now about your math paper . . . "

"Got a girl friend?"

"No. I have a copy of the worksheet . . . "

"Ever have one?"

"Yes," was Edward's only answer. It hardly seemed worthwhile to mention the math assignment again.

Regina took off her glasses and held them in her right hand, chewing on the end of a temple. She placed her left hand on Edward's arm. "What to tell me about it?" she asked.

Edward decided to play the game, hopefully end it, and get back to work. "Her name was Gloria," he began. "We went together for two years. I wanted to get married. She decided she wanted to see the world first. Went out West last I knew. Washington I think."

"Would you like to marry a queen?" she asked.

"Marry a queen? Well, I haven't thought . . . "

"Oh, by the way," she interrupted him. "I think I lost one of the math worksheets. If you could get another one, I'll do it over."

Another time Edward suggested she join one of the counseling groups.

"No," she simply answered.

"Why not?" he asked. "We do many activities. Fun things. And you can be with your friends."

"I don't have any friends," she said.

"What about Debbie, and Michele?"

"Loyal subjects," she answered.

ALL IN ALL, EDWARD WAS PLEASED WITH THE PROGRESS Regina seemed to have made. He called her mother once to report that Regina had improved her grades considerably as well as her relationships with her classmates.

"That's nice," said Mrs. Becquerel. "You've been doing a wonderful job of protecting Regina—so far."

During their telephone conversations Edward had tried to construct a mental image of Mrs. Becquerel. Each time he visualized an adult version of Regina.

Edward's period of confidence and peace ended quickly the day Regina stomped into his office. "That Melvin Johnson!" she shouted. "That, that weasel!"

At the word weasel Edward glanced instinctively at her bracelet. Only two charms, the king and the bear. He felt rather foolish. Consciously, he had convinced himself Regina or her bracelet could not possibly have had anything to do with Mrs. Wolington's death. Yet, somewhere in his subconscious the belief still did exist.

"He's been calling me a witch," she continued. "I wish I really was. I'd turn him into the weasel he really is."

"Are you angry with Melvin?" Edward asked.

"That's a stupid question," she answered. "Of course, I'm angry."

"Angry enough to kill him?" Edward asked.

She licked her lips several times and looked at the ceiling above the counselor's head. "No," she answered, "but if I turned him into a weasel, I wouldn't mind an eagle flying away with him."

Edward promised Regina that he would meet with Melvin, although he secretly doubted it would do any good. She left, apparently satisfied.

Edward sat at his desk, considering threats that might possibly convince Melvin to stop annoying Regina. The bell rang. He had not

realized the end of the school day was so near. Quickly he rose and ran into the hall. He peered about the hall, seeking to separate Melvin's broad body and round face from the teeming mass of scurrying students. He finally spotted Melvin at his locker. He was kicking it shut with the toe of his boot, having already thrown his textbooks on the locker floor where they usually enjoyed their night's rest.

Edward ran toward him. "Melvin," he shouted as loudly as he could to avoid any possible chance he would not be heard. As they saw Edward approaching, students stopped opening and closing lockers, putting away books, and walking. They became unusually quiet at the prospect of ending their typically dull day with a moment of excitement.

Edward looked directly at Melvin who stood akimbo looking back to him. Some students moved closer to hear better. Others, though, noted the expression on Edward's face and began to move away, deciding they would prefer to not share this experience.

"You've been teasing Regina," Edward began.

"So?" Melvin responded, and several students moved closer. Others began to move away.

"So I want you to quit it," Edward said.

"Ok," Melvin answered.

"What?"

"Ok, Mr. Rogers. I will. Promise."

Edward had not expected Melvin to capitulate so easily. He had expected to use three threats at the very least. "Thank you," was all he could think of to say.

The students were now beginning to leave, partly because the excitement was over and mostly because Mr. Mauser was now standing behind Edward.

"Problems?" Mr. Mauser asked as Melvin left.

"Not any more," answered Edward.

Edward walked back to his office. From his office he could see Regina standing on the sidewalk, sticking her tongue out at someone. By leaning far to his left, he could see the receiver of her gesture. It was Melvin. He was giving her the finger as he boarded his bus.

That evening Melvin's bicycle was found near the lake. The tires were flat, the light smashed, and some of the spokes bent. Melvin, or his body, or any part of his body was never found, even though divers were sent into the lake and people searched the nearby woods for days.

EDWARD AVOIDED SEEING REGINA FOR SEVERAL DAYS, afraid of seeing Melvin the weasel dangling from her bracelet. Anyway,

he had a counseling session scheduled with her during last period on Friday.

A pleasant, cool rain was falling that Friday. It had begun early in the morning and continued throughout the day, although the sky had begun to show signs of clearing by last period.

Regina walked into Edward's office and held her arm behind her back as if she was teasing him. She stood in front of his desk, smiling. He was tempted to grab her arm and yank it in front of her. The action wasn't necessary. She sat down and rested her left elbow on his desk. He looked hopefully at the charms: a king, a bear, and a rodent-like creature that could be a weasel.

Edward turned in his chair and stared out the window as she had often done. "Regina," he said, "you often compare people to animals. What kind of animal am I?"

"A fox," she answered without hesitating.

"Why, Regina, am I a fox?"

"Because you're sly and clever and you think you can trick me."

Edward turned and looked back at her. She was hitting the charms one at a time with her index finger.

"How about you, Regina? Are you an animal?"

She rubbed her right hand against her chin. "No," she answered slowly, "I'm a grape."

"A grape?" For a second Edward remembered a time when he believed nothing she said could surprise him. "Why would you want to be a grape?"

"Remember the story about the fox and the grapes?" she asked in return. "The grapes beat the fox."

Edward was beginning to feel more nervous, almost ill, damn scared. This was obviously one of her subtle threats.

"Wait here," he told her. "I'll be back soon."

EDWARD GLANCED BEHIND HIM TO BE SURE REGINA wasn't following and ran to Principal Mauser's office. In his practicum class, the professor had discussed the conditions under which a counselor might betray a confidence. A matter of life or death was one of them. This situation certainly could involve a danger to life—his.

Edward told the principal about his sessions with Regina. Mauser waited patiently for him to finish.

"You believe," he said, "that Regina is a princess from another planet who kills people with a magical charm bracelet?"

Edward looked at the picture near the front of the principal's desk. It showed Mauser wearing his college football uniform, a time when his

hair was still black. Edward always found it easier to talk to the picture rather than the present Mauser.

"Of course not," he answered. "But it is possible she is a very disturbed child capable of murder."

"But Wolington's death was an accident."

"How do we know? She could have been pushed over that railing."

"By Regina?"

"Why not? You said yourself that she was an old woman, not very well, nearly blind. In the darkness anyone could have pushed her."

Mr. Mauser stood and leaned with both hands on his metal desk. "And Melvin?"

"I don't know," Edward answered. "There are hundreds of ways to kill anyone, even someone twice your size."

"And hide the body so it can't be found?" Mauser shook his head. "I really thought you would be different," he said. "Not like most of these young punks who take a few psychology classes and end up screwier than the kids they are supposed to help."

"Look, Mr. Mauser, I'm . . . "

"Just stop," Mauser interrupted him. "You've been doing a good job here. I've been pleased. Even Regina was improving. I was going to recommend a permanent contract for you. But now? Oh Christ, let's talk about it later." He waved his hands as if he had just washed them and suddenly discovered there were no paper towels.

Edward nodded his head and left. He could see he wasn't going to get any help from anyone else. He would have to solve this problem himself. "Maybe I should have gone into administration," he muttered.

REGINA WAS STILL IN HIS OFFICE. EDWARD WAS PARTLY surprised and partly disappointed. He sat on his desk and stared directly at her. "Regina," he said, "I want the truth. I want to know exactly who the woman is you live with; where you got that bracelet and those charms; what you had to do with Mrs. Wolington's death; and what you know about Melvin!"

She folded her arms and looked away from him.

"And we will stay here until I find out," he added.

Regina sat silently. She looked at the window, the ceiling, the floor, the clock, anything except Edward. The bell rang, happy voices and racing feet filled the halls. The voices and footsteps mingled with the sounds of lockers opening and closing and occasional curses as combinations didn't work. Glancing out the window, Edward could see the buses begin to pull away. The rain had now stopped, and the sun occasionally shone through the clouds.

Regina began to cry. She removed her glasses and wiped her eyes with her right sleeve. Edward offered her a tissue from the box on his desk, but she ignored him. "I'm not a princess," she sobbed. "The woman you talked to really is my mother. She gave me the bracelet with the king. The other charms I found. I don't know anything about Mrs. Wolington or Melvin."

She stopped and took the tissue from his hand. "I've been silly," she said. "I lied. I'm sorry. Are you satisfied now?"

He placed his hand gently on her shoulder and smiled. "Of course, Regina, everything is fine now."

She started to smile. Instead, she began to cry again. "I missed my bus. How will I get home?"

"I'll take you," Edward said.

She smiled and put her glasses back on.

Except for the possibility of a custodian finishing his sweeping, the school already was deserted, typical for a Friday. Edward thought Mauser was probably at the nearest tavern washing away any effects of their encounter. They walked through the deserted hall to the parking lot and got into Edward's five-year-old Mustang.

REGINA LIVED ABOUT TEN MILES FROM SCHOOL. EDWARD wondered what she was thinking. She only spoke to give directions. The remainder of the time she silently sat slouched in the seat, her right shoulder hitting the car door with every bump.

Edward's feelings vacillated among relief, anticipation, and anxiety. He felt relief at having reached a breakthrough in his relationship with Regina, anticipation at the prospect of finally meeting her mother, and anxiety about his relationship with Mauser.

Her home was much the way Edward had pictured it, old, needing paint, and missing shingles from the roof. A faded curtain blew through a broken window. The lawn had probably not been mowed since early August. A few hardy pansies fought a losing battle against the weeds. A rusted, double-bladed axe rested against a pile of rotting wood. Although the house had electricity and a telephone, Edward noticed a waterpump in front and an outhouse in back.

A short, slight woman Edward perceived to be in her early thirties came out of the house and shuffled toward the car, much the way Regina had first entered his office. Edward studied her slender face, blonde hair, and wire-rimmed glasses. She certainly could be called an adult version of Regina.

"I missed my bus . . . " said Regina.

"And Mr. Rogers gave you a ride home," her mother interrupted.

"How nice."

Edward was both surprised and pleased she had recognized him. Obviously Regina had spoken frequently about him.

Mrs. Becquerel extended her hand. Edward grasped it and was surprised by the firmness of her grip.

"Would you like to come in?" she asked. "Some coffee perhaps?"

"Yes, thank you," Edward answered. He was anxious to see the inside of the house and to learn more about Regina's mother. Also, after the conflict with Mauser, his ego needed the praise he anticipated. He followed them through the doorway into the living room.

The house seemed to possess the same odor he had noticed in his first meeting with Regina. It was as if cheap perfume was being mixed with pails of sweat somewhere in the building.

"Please sit down." Regina's mother pointed at the only easy chair in the room. Edward thought a cat must have been using it as a scratching post.

Regina and her mother went into the kitchen. They closed the door. A moment later Edward heard the creak of a door opening and then a slamming sound.

Edward looked around the room. It reminded him of Regina. The peeling and faded yellow paint was the same shade as her blonde hair. The furniture of the room reminded him of Regina's clothes. The chair, sofa, rocker, table, and lamp seemed to bear no relationship to each other in style or color. The hardwood floor, without a single rug, reminded him of her scuffed clogs.

The walls of the room were completely bare except for a single picture. It was a black-framed photograph of a light-haired handsome man Edward judged to be in his early thirties.

Mrs. Becquerel returned, carrying a cup of coffee in each hand. "I hope you don't use sugar," she said.

"No, it's fine as it is," Edward answered.

"Oh, good," she said. "We're out of sugar. In fact, I sent Regina to borrow some." She handed Edward the cup from her left hand.

Edward thought he might have preferred a beer or something even stronger. Still, the first sip of coffee seemed to refresh him.

"Delicious," he said, and felt embarrassed by the triteness of his comment.

"Thank you," she acknowledged the compliment, "but I'm sure you want to talk about something besides my coffee. Regina perhaps?" She sat on the sofa, lifted the cup to her mouth, and sipped slowly.

Edward had been wondering how to work Regina into the conversation. "Today, I think we've taken some steps that will really help

her," he said.

"I know we have," she said and smiled a broad smile of crooked teeth.

Edward finished his coffee and set his cup on the table.

"More coffee?" she asked.

"No, thank you," he answered. "I've had enough."

"I know you have," she said and placed her cup on the table next to his. She stood and turned her back to him, looking instead at the photograph on the wall.

"Regina's father?" Edward asked.

"He didn't protect her either," she said without turning around.

Edward began to feel dizzy. "I'm sorry, I don't . . . ," he began.

"I treated him like a king," she interrupted and her voice became louder.

Edward tried to rise, but his legs would not support him, and he fell back into the chair.

She turned abruptly, now nearly screaming. "A king. And all he had to do was understand. And he didn't."

Edward struggled to rise, but knew it was no use. He could barely raise his arms.

Edward's vision was beginning to blur. Still, he could see the look of sadness on her face and the tears beginning to form behind her thick lenses. She took off her glasses and wiped her eyes with the back of her hand.

"You could have been a great king," she said softly. Edward thought he detected a touch of sadness in her voice.

She put her glasses back on and picked up her purse from the sofa. She opened it and took out a small object. Edward recognized it as a golden fox charm.

"Another charm for Regina's bracelet," she said and began to smile.

As if on cue the front door opened and Regina walked in. She held the axe Edward had earlier seen against the woodpile. She raised it above her head and shuffled toward him. Even with his blurred vision he could recognize the look of excitement on her face—like a child seeing Santa Claus for the first time.

"Now, momma?" she asked.

"No, dear. We'll take him outside. No sense getting the floor dirty." ●

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Edward Goldstein, Publisher

The big man leered at her and drew out a long steel knife, its blade encrusted with dry, brown blood. "You been on my case," he told her, "and now you're gonna die." He held the knife low, with the blade edge upwards, so he could cut open her abdomen with a single stroke . . .

Sweet Sister

by MEL WASHBURN

"YOU WON'T SUCCEED HERE," THE CAPTAIN TOLD THE new guard. "The warden should never have hired you. Guards don't need any of the female virtues: we just control the prisoners. That's all we do. And frankly, I don't think you have the necessary fortitude."

"Well, I hope I do," said the new guard.

It didn't seem like such a difficult job to her. The prison was small; it was fairly new. The stone walls were two feet thick, and the bars were of case-hardened steel. The windows were bullet-proof glass. The lieutenant at the hub console could watch all the wing corridors on closed-circuit TV. And if there was any real trouble, they had the

weapons in the magazine.

Each guard was required to qualify with a shotgun once a month, outside on the firing range. "This is the most frightening sound in the world," the magazine sergeant told her. "The sound of certain death." He pumped a fresh shell into the chamber of the shotgun. *Ka-chink!* "When a man hears that sound, the fight goes right out of him."

The first week she worked nights, and about all she saw of the cons was their heads on their pillows as she made the count every hour. What surprised her most was the odor. In spite of the fresh paint and disinfectant, in spite of the constant scrubbing and mopping and the fresh laundry every week, the whole place smelled of stale human sweat. Not the sweat of endeavor, which is clean in a way and honest, but the oozing, pungent sweat of anxiety and fear. The sweat engendered by the inevitable, the inescapable . . . and the fatal.

HER FOURTH NIGHT ON THE JOB, SHE FOUND A CONVICT hanging from a pipe in the shower room, a little after three A.M.—"Martinez, Alfredo J." He had turned up missing at head count. She had notified her sergeant and begun the search.

How many places could he be? Her footsteps echoed down the long corridor, rang on the grid, then echoed down the utility hallway. Carefully, she shone her flashlight into the mop closet, then into the towel locker, then into the shower room.

And there he was.

"In the shower room," she gasped into her handie-talkie. His tongue was still pink and his legs were loose. She heard rapid footsteps behind her and turned to see Max Jefferson, the tall, muscular black guard, trotting around the corner. "He's dead," she said weakly. Not just dead, but mutilated, with the still raw and bleeding initials "H. D." cut into his chest.

"Howie Dietz?" She asked the sergeant. "Honorio Desoto?" These were other cons on the same wing.

"I doubt it," said the sergeant. "This isn't the kind of work a man usually signs his name to."

THE NEXT WEEK, HER PLATOON WORKED DAYS.

Max Jefferson had been on the job seven years. "Don't make trouble with the cons if you don't have to," he advised her. "But also don't let them push you around." They had tried to intimidate him plenty, when he first came on the job. "I was the first black officer, just like you're the first woman. The cons were testing me all the time." He grinned. "I passed the test, and so will you."

Later, they held an inquiry on the death of Alfredo Martinez, with the warden sitting at the head of the table, the psychologist on his left side, a commissioner from central administration on his right. The commissioner had brought along an official stenographer.

"Is this a trial?" Tracey asked Jefferson as they came into the room. "Are they out to blame someone?" She was only halfway through her probationary period: the commissioner could discharge her on the slightest excuse.

"Don't worry," Jefferson whispered. "You followed procedure, they aren't going to dump on you."

She told her story and Jefferson told his. "We run a model prison here," the warden told the commissioner. "We have the finest staff, the most efficient procedures. But if a prisoner is bent on self-destruction, he will succeed. We can't protect him from himself."

"How did he get out of his cell?" the commissioner asked.

"By cunning born of desperation," explained the psychologist. "With spittle and urine, he short-circuited the electrical locking system. The deluded mind is often the most clever."

"And what about the initials on his chest?"

"Self-inflicted," said the warden.

"Huerfano Desamparado," explained the psychologist, "means 'fatherless, homeless one' in Spanish. Alfredo was almost obsessed with his own illegitimate birth."

"I see," said the commissioner gravely.

Outside the prison, Tracey knew, it was brilliant springtime. But in here, the humming fluorescent lights turned everything pale and colorless: the green walls, the warden's blue suit, the commissioner's red nose, all took on the same flat, yellowish hue.

After an hour of talk, the commissioner ruled the death a suicide and adjourned the hearing. Tracey and Jefferson returned to their regular duties.

THE NEXT WEEK, THEIR PLATOON WORKED SECOND shift, from three to eleven.

Tracey was overseeing the chowline, along with a couple of other guards. The food smelled pretty good, but it looked glutinous and pasty, like it was only a picture of food made with watercolor paints. The men's feet shuffled on the tile floor and they made quiet conversation, though they weren't supposed to talk at all. Every so often, Tracey could hear distinctly some con's stomach growling, it was that quiet.

And then, suddenly, from the back of the line somewhere, there

came a burst of maniacal laughter, and the temperature in the room seemed to rise ten degrees. Everyone began to move more slowly, or simply stood still. Hearts pounded. Faces turned pale. And flesh began to ooze pungent sweat. The two other guards stood tense and alert, trying to watch everywhere at once.

There was another burst of laughter.

Tracey, who was nearest of the three guards, strode towards the end of the line, looking for the source of the trouble. And then the source of the trouble came stumbling out of the line to meet her.

He was six-foot-two, with cheeks flushed a spotty pink and eyes gone red. He lurched heavily from foot to foot and a stream of drool hung from his chin. "Oh, sister! Oh, sweet sister!" He grinned and made a clawlike, grasping gesture with his large, dirty hands.

"Freeze, mister!" Tracey commanded.

"Oh, sister! Oh, sweet sister!" he chanted, and then he fell, reaching out, pulling her down with him onto the spotless tile floors. "Oh, sweet sister!" He pawed at her.

His breath smelled sweet, almost fruity, like a diabetic's breath in deep coma. He was strong, he was out of his mind, but when Tracey threw a knee into his groin, he felt it. "Ugh!" he grunted and rolled aside.

She pushed him over onto his belly and, with one hand tangled in his greasy hair, she used her other hand to leverage his muscular right arm up behind his back. "Don't move," she said hoarsely. "Don't move or I'll break it."

She noticed on the inside of his right bicep a very small, very crude tattoo. "H. D." was what it said.

"He was drunk on potato jack," the infirmary nurse told her. "His blood alcohol level was 0.22 percent." Which was high, Tracey knew. On the highway, a motorist was considered legally intoxicated at 0.10 percent.

"They make it themselves," the sergeant told her, "from potatoes and sugar stolen from commissary. They hide it everywhere. We can't find it all."

"A man that big, to get his blood level that high, must have drunk a gallon."

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders. "His friends probably threw him a party."

She told Jefferson about the initials. "His name is Delos Reinhardt, so where do the letters H and D come in?"

"Probably an old girlfriend. A lot of them have tattoos like that. Make them to pass the time. You know, eagles, broken hearts, daggers,

Confederate flags . . ."

"Girlfriends' initials?"

"That's right."

She asked to see the warden, but the sergeant said no. "You see the captain, and he sees the warden. That's the way it works."

So she went to see the captain, and he told her to forget about it. "Martinez was a troublemaker who killed himself. The coincidence of a couple of initials doesn't change that fact."

She insisted.

The captain frowned. "You're upset about Martinez's death. It's just female hysteria. You must learn to control yourself like a man does."

THE NEXT WEEK HER PLATOON WORKED NIGHTS. AFTER that, they worked days again. "We're taking you off 'D' wing," the lieutenant said, "putting you in the core."

"How come?"

"Captain's orders."

He wants me where he can keep an eye on me, she thought. *To watch for signs of female weakness.*

The only prisoners you saw in central core were the trustees who did the mop and broom work. Tracey especially got to know a guy they called Spider. "Because I'm skinny, all arms and legs," he assured her. "Not because I make webs."

Spider was an electronics wizard. He kept the TV in the guards' day room working perfectly. He fixed Tracey's clock radio for her, when she brought it in from home one day. And he gave her some advice. "You might think you've got a job here," he said, "but what you've really got is a sentence. They let you go home each day, like on a pass, but you got to come back sixteen hours later. You're a prisoner too, just like me."

Delos Reinhardt, the man who'd attacked her in the lunchroom, was given the lowliest job in the facility as part of his punishment. Every day for six hours he raked the exercise yard, making tiny, even furrows in the white gravel, first north to south, then east to west, then north to south again. Tracey stood at the window, sometimes, watching his endless, monotonous labors.

"He's a very orderly person," Spider said quietly.

"You don't say?"

"He imagines, he told me the other day, that each little pebble is a tombstone. That he's the caretaker of the world's largest cemetery. And he imagines that he knows the name that's engraved on each white

stone."

"He has a large imagination."

Spider put his hand on her shoulder. It was forbidden for cons to touch guards, but she didn't make an issue. She was fascinated. "Give yourself a parole," he said earnestly. "Quit this job while you can."

He was shorter than she was and so had to reach up to put his hand on her shoulder. As he did so, his shirtsleeve, which was rolled up over his bicep, slid away so that she could see, on the underside of his arm, a small, dark blue tattoo: "H. D." with a little crown above it.

He didn't know she could see this. He gave her a friendly little smile.

"I'VE BEEN THREATENED BY A PRISONER," SHE TOLD THE captain. "He warned me, indirectly, that I might be killed."

"Indirectly?" The captain looked up from his desk. "Get ahold of yourself, Alamo. Either curb these female imaginings or find a new job." He pointed to the door.

"It's a secret society, and the tattoo is their badge," she told Max Jefferson after work. "They killed Alfredo Martinez, and now they're trying to intimidate me."

The two were eating dinner together in a roadhouse where off-duty cops and sheriff's deputies often hung out. And off-duty prison guards too, though Tracey hadn't noticed any as they came in.

"The cons have their secret gangs," Max conceded. "Everybody knows that, though the warden doesn't want to admit it. But these veiled threats, they're just a test, just a mindgame is all. I don't think they'd really hurt you."

"They hurt Alfredo Martinez, I don't care what the commissioner decided. He was no suicide. I just know it, and you do too."

Max frowned thoughtfully, the cords of his muscular neck working as he ground his teeth. "Yes, I do know it," he said at last.

SHE BEGAN WATCHING DELOS RICHTER EVERY CHANCE she got, hoping to catch him with a weapon or some potato jack or something—anything she could bring before the warden to get him locked up in solitary, where he couldn't hurt her.

But he was on his best behavior. He raked the gravel in the yard. He sat in the library, reading books with large letters, pronouncing the words slowly to himself. He watched TV. He slept in his cell.

Sometimes, when he passed her in the corridor, he gave her a secret, menacing smile.

"You watch him too much," Spider told her one day as she stared out the window at the tall, solitary figure raking tiny furrows in the

white gravel of the yard.

"I'm on his case, Spider. I'm going to shake down his cell, next week when I'm working nights."

"You got the captain's approval?"

She smiled craftily. "Not yet, but I will after I do it, because I'm going to find the knife he cut up Alfredo Martinez with."

"Very smart," the Spider said.

She waited until a couple of hours after midnight, when all her paper work was done and the lieutenant sat in front of the console, staring at the TV monitors and trying unsuccessfully to stay awake. "I'll get us some coffee," she offered.

"Yeah," he joked dully. "Bring me about a gallon, willya?"

As she left the console room, she saw his head nodding again, his chin touching his chest. She figured it was safe to sneak down to "D" corridor for awhile.

"I've got a message for Jefferson," she told the wing sergeant, who just nodded sleepily and passed her through.

Richter's cell was on the second level, so she went up the circular stairway. As she entered the corridor, she looked hesitantly up at the TV camera mounted high on the wall, half-expecting to hear the lieutenant's voice come booming from the intercom, asking what the hell she was doing so far away from the coffee pot. But no sound came: apparently he was asleep, or at least not watching the monitors.

She took the heavy universal key from her belt loop and opened up Richter's cell. But there was no one inside. Where could he be?

She began to search.

HER FOOTSTEPS ECHOED DOWN THE LONG CORRIDOR, rang on the grid, then echoed down the utility hallway. She shone her flashlight into the mop closet, into the towel locker, into the shower room. And there he was.

"What are you doing in here?" she asked him sternly.

But he only leered at her in a dazed, sarcastic way and, reaching up to a steel ledge above the shower heads, he took down a long, steel knife, its blade encrusted with dry, brown blood.

"He's waiting for you," hissed the Spider behind her. "Go on in." He pushed her into the room.

"The Holy Defenders are taking vengeance," growled the hulking Richter. "You been on my case, now you're gonna die." He held the knife low, with the blade edge upwards, so as to cut open the abdomen with a single stroke. She put her back to the warm steel wall.

"You haven't got no gun," said the Spider. "And no handie-talkie

either."

She held her flashlight by the butt end, like a club. "She wants to fight," sneered Richter.

He came towards her, crouching low, shifting the knife from hand to hand. "Gonna cut you open, sweet sister," he crooned.

She swung her flashlight, knocking the knife from his hands.

He straightened himself and grinned. "Gonna choke you, sweet sister. Gonna squeeze the breath right out of you."

"Finish her," urged the Spider, "and we'll throw another potato-jack party, like after you snuffed Martinez." He moved slightly to her left, and the grinning Richter moved to her right. They were going to rush her from both sides together.

It seemed awfully quiet in that small room.

And then from out in the corridor, came the sound of a fresh shell being pumped into the chamber of a shotgun, *Ka-chink!* The most chilling sound in the world. The sound of certain death.

And Max Jefferson stepped through the door. "You fellas better stand very still," he said.

THE NEXT DAY, THE WARDEN ORDERED A SHAKEDOWN of the whole prison. Three knives, assorted clubs, several gallons of potato jack, and a homemade still were found. And six prisoners with the tattoo "H. D." were transferred to various other prisons in the system.

A month later, Jefferson and Alamo both sewed new sergeant's stripes onto their sleeves. The magazine sergeant was promoted to lieutenant for having the courage to issue Jefferson a shotgun without the captain's approval. And the lieutenant who had allowed Jefferson and Alamo to set up their ambush (Or had he been asleep through the whole thing?) was promoted to captain. And the captain became a mere guard again.

"How did you know," the warden asked Tracey, "that Richter was the one who killed Martinez?"

"It was female intuition," Max Jefferson said. "That's what it must have been." ●

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

Mel Washburn *(Sweet Sister):*

EDUCATION: M.A., Ph. D., English Literature and Medieval Latin Studies, University of Chicago.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND: Campaign staffer for McGovern for President (1972). Community Organizer for Community Action Programs. Lecturer in English at Central College, Iowa; University of Wisconsin—Green Bay; University of Wisconsin—Rock County; University of Wisconsin—Whitewater (1967-1983).

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FICTION PUBLICATIONS: short stories and poems have appeared in Cavalier, Cavalier Yearbook, Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine, Poetry View, and Muse.

He had to stay perfectly still. The slightest movement would blow him apart!

Smithereens

by ALAN WARREN

THE SUN HATED THEM.

Hewitt had gotten into the habit of removing his wide-brimmed hat every hundred yards or so, and mopping perspiration from his forehead with the back of his hand. He was doing it now, as they squatted on their haunches in a small patch of shade provided by a boulder atop a column of rocks. It was an exceptionally hot day, even for the desert.

"Is this the point at which I'm supposed to say I'm sorry I came?" Hewitt asked.

"I don't know," said Jaderstrom. "Is it?"

Hewitt fitted his hat back on his head. His reddish-brown hair was hanging in damp, stringy curls down his forehead, the ends of several curls just touching his eyebrows.

"I think you'll agree I've held up pretty well so far," he said.

Marc Jaderstrom nodded. "Pretty well."

"So what's on the agenda for today?"

Jaderstrom squinted his eyes against the sun's dazzling brilliance, and stared out across the vast expanse of dry, suncracked land.

"We'll continue on ahead. The desert gives out about a mile further on. There's wooded land after that. Then we'll continue on toward the creek. From there it's about another mile and a quarter back to the cabin. You up to that?"

Hewitt grinned. "I wasn't a basket case before I came out here. Just a little out of shape. I'll manage."

"Good. Anytime you're ready."

Hewitt got to his feet, pulling the straps of his backpack taut around his shoulders. "Any more stops before we get to the wooded area?" he asked.

Jaderstrom shook his head. "This was the only one. From here on we're in the open, and it's going to be hot. Just like the real desert."

"I have my canteen," Hewitt said.

"You're going to need it. Ready?"

THEY STARTED OFF AT THE SAME EASY PACE THEY HAD been averaging since setting out at six o'clock that morning. By mid-afternoon every muscle and joint in Hewitt's body would be aching, and when he climbed into bed that night at the cabin he owned and Jaderstrom tended, he would sleep like the dead. It never failed. But it had been a long time since his last trip up here; his muscles and stamina were not what they had been. And he had to face the fact that, like it or not, he was getting older.

He kept behind Jaderstrom and slightly to his right, letting him lead the way. Jaderstrom knew this part of the country like his backyard, knew every shortcut, every dead end, and a thousand and one ways of easing hiking, saving energy, and keeping from doubling back. He also knew woodlore, and was in better shape than Hewitt—not surprising, since he tended the cabin on weekends while Hewitt remained in the city, enjoying Janice's favors, mixing drinks for himself and her, and seeing that the temperature of their hot tub remained a steady 105°.

They had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile when Hewitt stopped.

"Hold up," he said.

Jaderstrom turned. His companion wiped his forehead with his forearm, then unslung his backpack. He got his canteen out and uncapped it.

"Better conserve your water," Jaderstrom said.

"There's plenty left. I'm not worried."

Hewitt took a long, satisfying swallow, then capped the canteen, fitted it into his backpack, and slid the straps back over his shoulders.

"You know, when you look at the land from this perspective, it looks like the desert stretches out forever," Hewitt was saying. "Seems almost like—"

"Hewitt! For God's sake, don't move!"

Jaderstrom's voice, harsh and commanding and urgent against the desert's stillness, sent an incongruous chill up Hewitt's spine. He had taken a step or two forward while repositioning his backpack, and now he stood stock-still, his heart pounding, every nerve alert, as though he

had been touched by a red-hot poker.

"Stand perfectly still," Jaderstrom said. "Don't move even an inch."

The smaller man had crouched at Hewitt's side, a few inches in front of him and to the right.

"What is it?" Hewitt said. "For God's sake."

He stood looking down at Jaderstrom crouched below him, examining the ground around his feet. Or rather foot: Hewitt's right shoe seemed to be the object of Jaderstrom's attention.

At last, after what seemed a full minute, Jaderstrom straightened up. His eyes never left the ground.

"Will you tell me what it is?" Hewitt asked.

"It's a mine," Jaderstrom said.

"A mine?" Hewitt blinked his eyes, not comprehending.

"You've stepped on a mine. God knows what it's doing way out here, but that's what it is."

"My God," said Hewitt slowly.

His attention began to focus on his right foot. Whereas a moment before, he had hardly been aware of its existence, now his entire being seemed to have shrunk to the width and length of his size 10-A hiking boot. His heart was thumping with jackhammer beats as he inclined his head downward.

There was nothing to be seen beside the outline of his foot, two or three inches in advance of its companion, resting on the dry, sunbaked earth.

"Are you sure?" he asked Jaderstrom. His voice was barely above a whisper.

"I intend to be sure," Jaderstrom said.

Slowly, he lowered himself toward the ground so he was squatting a few inches away from Hewitt.

"Now," Jaderstrom said, "listen very carefully to what I say. When I tell you to, I want you to raise your right foot very, *very* slowly, no more than a fraction of an inch. Got that? Very, very slowly, and no more than a fraction of an inch. Okay?"

"Okay," Hewitt whispered. He was surprised to find he had lost most of his power of speech.

"All right. Go ahead. And remember—slowly."

With painstaking deliberation, Hewitt let the toes of his right foot rise a fraction of an inch off the dry, cracked earth. For the first time he felt something underneath the thick rubber sole of his boot—from the feel of it, it could have been a rock or even a pebble no bigger than a child's whistle.

"Okay," Jaderstrom said. "That's enough. Don't raise it any higher. I see it."

Hewitt did not look down. He kept his eyes on the far-off horizon, fixing his gaze on a clump of trees and shrubbery atop a hillock four or five hundred yards away.

After a moment that stretched out and out to what seemed half of eternity, Jaderstrom said:

"All right. Lower your foot. *Carefully.*"

Hewitt did as he was told. Jaderstrom stood up.

Hewitt again found he could barely speak. "Is it—"

Jaderstrom nodded. "Yeah."

Hewitt closed his eyes and sucked in his breath.

Jaderstrom's gaze remained fixed on Hewitt's foot. He was thinking hard. After several seconds he said, "We don't have much choice. Obviously, you're going to have to stay just where you are, and not move your foot. There's a camp about three miles back. They'll have a telephone there. They can get in touch with someone. If—*damnit.*"

"What's wrong?"

"I just remembered. Today's Sunday. Going to be hard to get someone with the know-how to take a mine apart out here, in the middle of nowhere."

Hewitt felt a thin line of sweat gathering on his forehead just above his eyebrows, but made no move to wipe it away. "There must be someone," he said.

"There is. It's just a question of getting to that someone."

Hewitt felt his heart sinking. For the first time he realized just how helpless he was. "What am I going to—how can I—?"

"You can't do anything," Jaderstrom said. "It's up to me. I'm going to have to hike back to the camp and see if I can get in there to use their telephone. I may have to break in, if necessary. If I can't, then I'll have to go that much further to reach someone. It may take me several hours."

"Oh, God," Hewitt said.

Jaderstrom shrugged. "I don't see that there's any other choice. Nobody ever comes out this far. Unless you can think of something?"

Hewitt probed the roof of his mouth with his tongue. The inside of his mouth felt very dry. All the saliva seemed to have dried away. At last he shook his head.

"Well," Jaderstrom said, "the sooner I go, sooner I'll be back. You think you can stick it out?"

Hewitt attempted to speak. No sound came out. He wet his lips as best he could, and tried again: "You said yourself we don't have any

other choice."

Jaderstrom nodded. "I'll leave you the water in my canteen. Added to what you have, it isn't much, but it ought to last you till I get back."

Their eyes met, and briefly locked. Then Jaderstrom looked away. "I'd better get going."

He unslung his backpack, took out his canteen, and handed it to Hewitt.

"One question," Hewitt said. His voice was no more than a croak, and he cleared his throat before he spoke again. "The mine—why didn't it go off when I stepped on it?"

Jaderstrom grinned humorlessly.

"That's easy. This is a wartime model. They have a peculiar design. When you step down on them you trigger the firing mechanism. Like pulling the pin on a hand grenade. The minute you take your foot off you release the pressure, and the thing goes off. Tremendous force. It'll scatter parts of you seventy-five feet away."

Hewitt shivered despite the blazing heat.

"Sorry," Jaderstrom said. "Didn't mean to spook you. But it's important to remember: don't take your foot off. No matter what. A slip of your foot will take your head clean off."

"I won't," Hewitt said, then, seeing Jaderstrom was cross-examining him with his eyes, he added, "I won't."

"Okay, then. With luck, I should be back in two hours or so."

Their eyes met and locked again, and this time it was Hewitt who looked away.

"You'd better get going."

Jaderstrom nodded, turned on his heel and set off, walking at a brisk, steady pace. When he was about a hundred yards away he stopped and glanced back fleetingly, then turned and walked on as though Hewitt had not been there at all.

Two hours, Hewitt thought. And in this heat. Thank God for my hat.

Hewitt kept his eyes fixed on Jaderstrom's figure as it grew smaller and smaller, then vanished over a small rise and was lost to sight.

Two hours, Hewitt thought. And another half-hour for them to disarm the mine. In two and a half hours he would be sitting in a ranger's cabin gulping a brandy and laughing about it with Jaderstrom and the rangers and the man called in to disarm it. And how would he do that? Probably by digging out the earth all around Hewitt's foot, keeping constant pressure on the head of the device, then easing his foot off it as soon as the firing mechanism had been removed or disabled.

Hewitt glanced down at his watch. Ten after ten. Barely five minutes had passed since Jaderstrom had set off, and already it seemed an hour. Soon enough, he knew, he would lose his sense of time altogether.

AN HOUR LATER THE SUN WAS DIRECTLY OVERHEAD. Rivulets of sweat had begun to leak down the sides of his nose, joining just above his upper lip where they hung tremulously, like tears, until he wiped them away with the heel of his palm.

What if I forget? he wondered. What if, through sheer force of habit, I take a step forward or backward with that foot?

Silly question: you know goddamned well what will happen. Your head will wind up seventy-five feet away from your lower intestines, and the rest of you will lay scattered over the desert sands. When Jaderstrom and his party come marching along they'll find it difficult piecing you together.

His hands had grown clammy, and he palmed them on his thighs.

AN HOUR OR SO LATER, THE WIND BLEW UP.

It started slowly. Hewitt felt it pick up his shirttails and set them flapping, and felt the sudden blast of hot air on the back of his neck, as if a semi had passed him on the highway and momentarily bathed him in its backwash.

The third time it blew up, it happened suddenly, without warning. He was removing his backpack to get to his canteen, and in a sudden fit of treachery the wind had come screaming out of nowhere in a headlong blast of scorching heat, lifting Hewitt's hat clear off his head and hurling it aloft in its wake.

His hand occupied, he dropped the backpack and reached for his hat. He missed it by inches.

"Goddamnit," he said.

Something wet and salty settled on his lips. Tears. Without realizing it he had begun to cry.

AN HOUR HAD PASSED. AN HOUR HAD NOT PASSED. IT was impossible to tell. Time had not simply lost its meaning; it had ceased to exist altogether. Hewitt had begun to wonder where he was. Every few minutes he told himself he was in the desert, a desert bordered by rangers' stations and wooded areas, and that he must not move his foot because there was a land mine directly underneath. Of course, he thought, how could I have forgotten? And then a few minutes would pass and he would wonder where he was again.

The sun had begun to bake his face, and his lips had begun to swell.

Somewhere in the back of his mind was the thought that someone—he had forgotten whom—knew where he was, and was coming, bringing friends that would remove him from this relentless heat.

But then he forgot even that, and began to wonder exactly how many grains of sand there were in this desert that stretched out to the limits of infinity. It would be interesting to count them. Once, he nearly made the mistake of kneeling and beginning to count, but remembered something he had been told a long time ago—a year? A hundred years? A million?—that he must not, no, must not, raise his right foot.

And sometime after that, the truth came to him. Of course he could not count each grain of sand in the desert, because he himself was no more than a grain of sand, one tiny, infinitesimally small speck amongst the millions and hundreds of millions of other grains of sand that together made up the vast desert that stretched out beyond horizons, beyond the planets, beyond the solar system, beyond beyond.

And the thought of counting each of those grains of sand, including himself, suddenly seemed humorous. He smiled, and the smile became a chuckle, and the chuckle became a laugh, and soon he was laughing hysterically, as though it were the funniest joke in the world, and only he knew the punchline.

THEY FOUND HIM NINE HOURS LATER

By then the sun had gone down and the desert was no longer hot. It was numbingly cold. Each of the men in the jeep wore gloves except Jaderstrom, who kept rubbing his hands together.

"There he is," the driver said.

They pulled up a few yards in front of him. He was still standing in the same position, facing the same direction, he had been in since ten o'clock that morning. He did not seem aware of the four men as they approached.

"You all right?" the ranger asked.

He received no response. The figure, silhouetted in the jeep's headlights, remained stock-still. A man with a flashlight played its beam over Hewitt's face.

"My God," the man said.

The others stopped and stared.

"Mr. Hewitt?" the ranger said.

The figure remained staring, glassy-eyed, at the trees and brush in the far-off horizon that had ceased to be visible with the onset of darkness.

"He's out of it," the man with the flashlight said.

"We'd better get him back to the station," the ranger said. "Grab his arms."

The three of them—the ranger and his two men—took hold of Hewitt's arms.

"No," said Hewitt.

"What's the matter?" the ranger asked.

"My foot. The mine," said Hewitt, and began to cry.

"Bring him along," the ranger said.

"No!" Hewitt shouted. His voice was very loud in the desert's stillness.

They pulled him, using all their strength. He screamed as he stumbled forward. It took their combined efforts to force him away from the spot on which he had been standing and over toward the jeep. A small rock, about the size of a child's whistle, overturned as he moved away.

"My foot," Hewitt said. "My God, my foot's been blown off."

"Better put a blanket over him," the ranger said.

One of his men took a blanket from the back of the jeep and covered Hewitt with it. He no longer offered any resistance. After a moment he began to cry.

The ranger walked around the side of the jeep and approached Jaderstrom.

"Was he like that when you left him?" he asked.

Jaderstrom nodded.

"He seems to think he was standing on a land mine," the ranger said. "Where do you suppose he got that fixation?" Jaderstrom shrugged. He took a cigarette from the pack in his pocket and lit it.

"The heat, I suppose," said the ranger. "Puts all kinds of ideas in a person's head."

Jaderstrom continued smoking his cigarette, staring at the huddled figure whimpering softly in the back of the jeep.

"Too bad you got lost," the ranger said. "If you'd gotten to us sooner, we might have—"

"Yeah," Jaderstrom said. He took the cigarette out of his mouth, dropped it onto the desert sand, and crushed it underneath his heel. "We'd better get going."

The ranger nodded to the driver, who started the jeep's engine. Jaderstrom and the ranger climbed in, and the jeep shot off, picking up speed, carrying Jaderstrom back toward civilization, where a woman named Janice lay waiting, waiting. ●

Mixing business with pleasure can be dangerous—especially when the business is illegal!

A Matter of Policy

by MICHAEL BRACKEN

I SLIPPED THE DRUGGED SLAB OF RUMP ROAST THROUGH the small opening I'd made in the kitchen window, waited ten minutes in silence, then quietly slid the window upward, swung my leg over the dusty sill, and dropped cautiously to the yellow linoleum. I waited, letting my eyes adjust to the darkness surrounding me. I heard the beagle before I saw him—he was snoring under the dining room table, the rump roast completely devoured.

I made my way past him to the bedroom where Mrs. Jan Edelman, a 32-year-old widow, snored delicately under a thick layer of covers. I pulled open the top left dresser drawer and rooted carefully through her pastel-colored panties, then opened the drawer on the right. It protested, the wood squealing as I pulled. I hesitated and looked into the mirror as Mrs. Edelman moved restlessly. She rolled over and kicked away her covers.

I glanced at her in the mirror before continuing my gentle pulling on the drawer. It didn't protest again and inside, tucked back behind a wool sweater, inside a small jewelry case, I found the treasure I was expecting—two diamond rings and an emerald brooch—and something I hadn't been expecting—a small roll of bills. I pocketed it all quietly, carefully closed the drawer without protest, then returned to the kitchen.

The beagle was still snoring and wheezing as I exited the house and

pulled the window closed. I dropped to the well-manicured lawn, then ran bent half-over down the length of the chest-high hedge to the alley at the rear of her property. I checked the alley twice, then removed the black ski mask and the leather gloves, stuffing them into my empty jacket pocket.

I found my car two blocks away where I'd left it, released the parking brake, shifted into neutral, and coasted silently downhill for another two blocks before starting the engine.

Within a few days I'd be back at her house. Anytime a client lost more than $20,000 in a robbery, the insurance company sent me out to investigate the circumstances. I wasn't supposed to find the thief—that was a job for the police—just to make sure the client wasn't trying to swindle the company, make sure a reasonable amount of precaution had been taken to avoid the robbery, and lecture the client on the value of silent alarms and other home protection devices, all of which I did remarkably well.

THE NEXT MORNING I TUCKED THE JEWELS AWAY IN A safe deposit box I kept under an assumed name on the far side of the city, and retrieved a pair of diamond earrings and a stickpin from a job I'd pulled three months earlier.

That afternoon I visited Carneghi's on my way back to the office from a safety lecture I'd given to a 67-year-old matron who insisted on keeping her deceased husband's coin collection on display in the library of her mansion until some scoundrel had made off with the bulk of it.

The scent of cherry incense hung thick in the air and the strains of Led Zeppelin filtered through two pair of mismatched stereo speakers when I stepped through the doors of the southside furniture restoration shop. It was like taking a step back in the sixties, and I was greeted by a dark Italian man in his early thirties. He had thick black hair tumbling down to his shoulders and a pair of gold John Lennon glasses perched on his sharp nose. He wore a faded green fatigue jacket over his blue workshirt even through it was hot and sticky inside the old building.

Carneghi inspected the jewelry carefully. Despite his appearance, Carneghi was the best jewel fence in the city ever since D'Angelo's boys had offed ferret-face Freddie the Fence over some drug deal.

"Not bad," Carneghi said quietly. "Not bad at all."

"How much?" I asked. I had an alimony payment due and my bank balance read zero.

"Fifteen hundred," he said. He brushed back a black tangle of hair. "Maybe sixteen."

"Sixteen," I agreed. I knew the earrings were worth a lot more, but I

was in no position to haggle. If I didn't get my ex-wife's alimony payment in the mail soon she'd have her lawyer on my back. The last time I'd tangled with him he'd won a fifty dollar a month increase in payments from a sympathetic female judge.

Carneghi counted out sixteen one-hundred-dollar bills from a thick wad in his jacket pocket and laid them on the glass counter top. "Come and see me again sometime," he said. "Maybe I can make you a good deal on a nice Queen Anne."

I shook my head. Antique furniture wasn't my style.

AFTER I MADE THE ALIMONY PAYMENT, CAUGHT UP ON the car payments, treated myself to a pair of surf-and-turf dinners, and lost a bundle to my bookie, I was back where I started from and it was much too soon to fence Mrs. Edelman's jewels.

I tugged at the tight knot of my silk tie and undid the collar button of my pale blue Christian Dior shirt. It was hot in the office as I thumbed through a stack of client files. I had two lectures to make that afternoon: Mr. Joe Zibigski had lost a valuable stamp collection and Mrs. Jan Edelman was due for her lecture on home protection.

Mr. Zibigski's case would be easy—the police had already apprehended the punk who kicked in his window and most of the stamp collection had been discovered intact. It was a simple matter of determining the value of the damaged stamps and another department would handle that chore. I gave Mr. Zibigski the standard lecture over the phone, then called Mrs. Edelman to make an appointment for after lunch.

When she met me at her door, I handed her my embossed business card, and felt a tingle of excitement surge through my hand when her fingers brushed against mine. She read the name on the face of the card, but didn't ask for any further identification. "Come in, Mr. Niven," she said as she stepped aside to usher me into the foyer.

Her beagle came rushing around the corner of the living room where it opened upon the foyer, his deep bark startling me. I stooped and offered the chunky dog the back of my hand to sniff, sure that he would remember my scent from the rump roast. I scratched behind his floppy ears and looked up at Mrs. Edelman. "Has he got a name?"

"Yours," she said.

"Mine?" I didn't understand and I said so.

"Yours," she repeated. "As in 'Up Yours.' He was my husband's dog."

I smiled, not sure if she was being serious. After one last healthy rub, I stood and faced her. "We might as well get down to business," I said.

"Tell me about the robbery."

There was nothing she told me on our tour of the kitchen, the hall, and the bedroom, that I didn't already know and know more intimately than she could possibly suspect. Finally, after she offered me a seat in the living room and filled my hand with a scotch and soda, I asked, "Why did you keep such valuable jewels in the house, Mrs. Edelman?"

"I never really thought about it," she said. "Most of my jewelry is in a safe deposit box downtown. I take a piece out now and then to wear to parties, theatre openings, and the like, but the two rings held a certain sentimental value for me. One was my engagement ring, the other was one of the presents my husband gave me on our tenth anniversary."

"And the brooch?" I prompted.

"That was left over from a dinner party I gave a few weeks ago. I just hadn't gotten it back to the bank yet."

I nodded. "It's carelessness like that that causes a lot of people to lose their valuables." I paused, glanced at her as she crossed her firm legs at the knees, her dark brown slacks edging upward to expose her well-turned ankle. Then I glanced down at the dog panting at my feet. "Didn't Yours make any sort of commotion?"

"I wondered about that myself," she admitted. "But he apparently slept through the whole thing."

I nodded as if filing the information away in my memory. Actually I was nodding because that's exactly what the dog had done. Then I gave her standard lecture number four, pointing out all the advantages of a properly installed security system, ending with the note that I could recommend at least three different companies who had done exceptional work for our clients in the past. I finished the scotch and soda and stood. "I don't see anything wrong with your claim, Mrs. Edelman—"

"Jan," she interrupted.

Smiling, I continued. "I'll do all the necessary paperwork when I get back to the office. If you'd like, I could come by tomorrow with everything ready for you to sign. Once it clears accounting, you should get your insurance check by mail within a week."

She considered me for a moment as I stood before the couch, the panting beagle at my side. I knew what she saw, and I was rather proud of the condition I'd kept myself in—unlike the two other adjusters working out of my office. The three-piece blue pinstripe was European cut, fitting my muscular body almost like a glove. Only a few years older than her, I surely looked younger than my birthdays should have allowed.

"If you finished all the paperwork this afternoon," she said carefully, "perhaps you could bring it by this evening. I could have dinner ready by six . . . " Her voice trailed off slowly and I knew the option was mine.

"Very well, then," I said, still smiling, most of the business tone gone from my voice. I had never become involved with one of my targets before and against my better judgement, I found myself saying, "Tonight at six."

I RUSHED THROUGH THE FINAL FEW HOURS OF THE afternoon, efficiently hustling through all the paperwork before the office secretary locked up her typewriter for the night. With all the duplicate and triplicate forms tucked into a new file folder, I washed my face in the men's room and combed my dark hair back into place. In the glove compartment of my LTD was a small bottle of cologne and I splashed some on before returning to Jan Edelman's west county home.

She was wearing a pale green evening gown that delicately hugged the gentle curves of her body, with a neckline that plunged dangerously low. Her long blonde hair tumbled gracefully around the soft curves of her exposed shoulders and a thin gold necklace swung between her breasts. She ushered me into the den and offered me my second scotch and soda of the day.

"Dinner will be ready in a few minutes." She handed me the drink, then left me in the den with Yours. The overweight beagle sat on a chair across the room from me and wheezed twice before laying down.

"Cheers," I said as I raised the glass toward him. He wheezed again.

I walked slowly around the room, my glance quickly examining the spines of a few hundred books in the built-in bookcase, seeing nothing of interest. I brushed a fingertip across the heavy oak fireplace mantle and my finger came away clean. Stooping to read the signature on a giant oil painting of the city skyline, I saw a familiar name and whistled softly when I realized it was an original. Before I had finished my circumnavigation of the room, Jan was back to escort me into the dining room. I carried my half-empty glass with me, but left the file folder on the end table where I'd placed it earlier.

Dinner began with shrimp cocktail and was followed by a thick steak, baked potatoes smothered in butter and sour cream, snow peas and pearl onions, thick slices of french bread soaked with butter and garlic salt, all accompanied by a bottle of imported red wine that probably cost as much as my suit.

Jan smiled a lot through dinner, and we made small talk about a half

a dozen unimportant things. She told me about her husband's heart attack and I told her about my ex-wife's niggling lawyer. We both talked about dogs we had owned and we fed our scraps to Yours in his own Fitz & Floyd dinner bowl.

I helped her clear the table and offered to dry dishes while she washed.

"Leave them," she said, her soft voice thickened by the wine. "I'll have the maid do them tomorrow when she comes in."

I hadn't seen anyone else in the house earlier that day and I asked about it.

"Day off," Jan said. She took my elbow in the palm of her hand and led me out of the kitchen towards the den. "Sundays and Tuesdays. Does the shopping Monday afternoon, so she doesn't really bother me much."

In the den she fixed a third scotch and soda. After handing it to me, she pressed a button and a large-screen TV rose from a cabinet against the far wall.

"Pick out a movie," Jan said as she opened a cabinet under the bookcase. Inside were nearly a hundred video cassettes and I was mildly surprised by the handful of X-rated features mixed in with the other movies. I picked out an innocuous R-rated movie and handed it to her. Inside another cabinet was a VCR and she inserted the cassette, touched a few buttons, dimmed the lights, and moved to sit beside me on the couch.

She fit neatly into the crook of my arm and I let my fingertips stroll easily up and down her exposed arm and shoulder. It was almost nine by the time the movie ended. Jan had made no effort to do anything more than snuggle during the movie. She was slow to peel herself away from me to switch the light back on.

I cleared my throat and reached for the file folder while she lowered the television screen. "It's getting late," I told her. "Maybe we'd better get these signed before we forget."

The effects of the wine had worn off and she spoke clearly. "Maybe we'd better."

I laid the forms on the coffee table for her, explaining what each was for. She read a few of them, scanned most of the others, then took the ballpoint from my hand and quickly signed them all.

I stood, straightened my jacket, gathered up all the papers and made my way to the front door with her at my elbow. I reached out to open the heavy wooden door and she pressed her palm against it to stop me. "When will I see you again?" she asked.

"How soon would you like to?"

"Dinner again," she said. "The day after tomorrow." She reached up and took my square chin in her hand. Then she pressed her soft lips against mine, her body molding itself to my firm lines. I felt her ample breasts pressing against my chest and I felt the fire in my loins begin to spread.

Then she broke the kiss and took a small step backward.

"Dinner's on me this time," I said. "I'll pick you up at six." Then, reluctantly, I left, the beagle following me out the door to make use of a tree.

I SAW JAN A HALF DOZEN MORE TIMES DURING THE FOLlowing three weeks, occasionally dining at her house, other times I took her out. We had oriental food at Shanghai's one night, drove across the river to Ricci's another, and twice went to the hill for Italian food. One Friday, after an especially well-prepared Italian dinner, we stopped at the Wolfe Theatre to watch Maxwell, a grossly overweight standup comic who'd rocketed to stardom on the basis of his wife jokes.

I soon learned that Jan Edelman's tastes ran far higher than my exwife's and I began to have problems stretching my paycheck to cover the dinners we'd been eating together. Even my bookie was complaining that I wasn't doing enough betting to keep him supplied with the finer things in life.

Although I hadn't waited as long as I liked to, but because I knew that Jan had already received her check from the insurance company, I pulled the two diamond rings and the emerald brooch from my safe deposit box, found a small diamond necklace from a job almost a year old, and took the lot into Carneghi's southside furniture repair shop.

The dark Italian relic from the sixties was bent over a hutch haggling with an elderly black woman when I entered the shop, so I roamed around among the antique furniture until they'd reached a suitable price and he'd promised her delivery first thing the following Tuesday. When the old woman finally shuffled out of the shop, I approached Carneghi with the jewels.

"I can give you six hundred for this," he said, holding up the diamond necklace, "and another two for the brooch." He dismissed the rings with a wave of his hand. "Those are junk."

I stared down at the rings. One was a diamond solitaire, the other a diamond encrusted dinner ring. "They were insured for $22,000," I told him.

He shook his head, greasy black hair swinging behind him. "Don't matter," he said. "They're not worth $22 to me. They're junk."

I took the eight hundred for the necklace and the brooch and

pocketed the two rings. Carneghi had never steered me wrong from the time I had first started dealing with him and I had no reason to begin doubting his word.

Back at the office, I pulled the Edelman file and read it carefully. There was nothing I could do about the check Jan had already cashed, even though I knew the company had been ripped off for $22,000. If I said anything about it I was sure to implicate myself. Still, I was ashamed to have gone to so much effort for a mere $200—hardly enough for dinner, a show, and a dozen long-stemmed roses.

Nothing in the file seemed out of order—if it had been I never would have singled her out as one of my targets. I had always been careful to pick only well-insured targets who could afford to lose a few valuables.

I shook my head and closed the folder, then sent it out to the secretary to be refiled, along with a handful of others I'd finished with earlier in the day. Leaning back in my chair, I slid my hand into my jacket pocket and toyed with the two worthless rings, mentally sorting through a variety of thoughts.

After we returned from the theatre that evening, Jan invited me into her house. Yours met us at the door and followed us into the den, wheezing and grunting the entire distance.

Jan prepared drinks for both of us without asking, took a sip from hers and handed my glass to me. "I've enjoyed these past few weeks," she said.

I had, too, and I told her so.

"In fact," she said as she set her glass on the end table after taking a second sip, "I haven't felt like this since my husband died."

I ignored the comparison to a dead man, sure that she meant it as a compliment. Jan pressed herself up against me, tilted her head back. The kiss was deep, penetrating. Then our lips parted and I stepped back for a moment to set my scotch and soda on the table next to her drink.

I reached for my glass and took another sip of scotch and soda, then reached into my jacket pocket for the dinner ring. I dropped it on the table before her. She blanched, the flush quickly disappearing from her cheeks.

"Where'd you get that?" she whispered hoarsely.

"I have my sources," I said, not prepared to admit anything.

"But I thought it was gone for good."

"Something like that usually is." I reached into my jacket pocket for the other ring and I dropped it beside the first. She couldn't have paled any more but she seemed to try. "They're trash jewelry," I told her.

"Do I—" She paused, gulped down a quick swallow from her drink, and spoke again. "Do I have to give the insurance money back?"

"I haven't decided," I said. "Tell me about the rest of your jewelry. Is it all fake, too?"

"Most of it," she admitted. "I have a friend who duplicates what I have and sells the originals for me. When these were stolen it was, well—" She stopped nervously, ran her fingers through her hair, her breasts moving up and down as she spoke. She took a deep breath and blurted out the rest of the story. "My husband didn't leave me with much cash. I've had to sell the jewelry to pay the bills. I didn't want to change my lifestyle. My friend said nobody but an expert could tell they were fakes. And when they were stolen, I figured I wouldn't say anything—just take the insurance money and keep my mouth shut."

"That's fraud," I told her, still not mentioning my own part in the whole affair.

"I don't have the money anymore," she said quietly. "I couldn't pay it back even if I had to."

I spent the next few hours convincing her that I could have her thrown in jail for what she had done, and by the time I was finished with her I thought I had her ready to do anything I said. Then I began to outline a sophisticated plan I'd developed earlier in the afternoon to defraud the company out of another quarter of a million dollars using her over-insured fake jewelry as the stepping stone toward wealth.

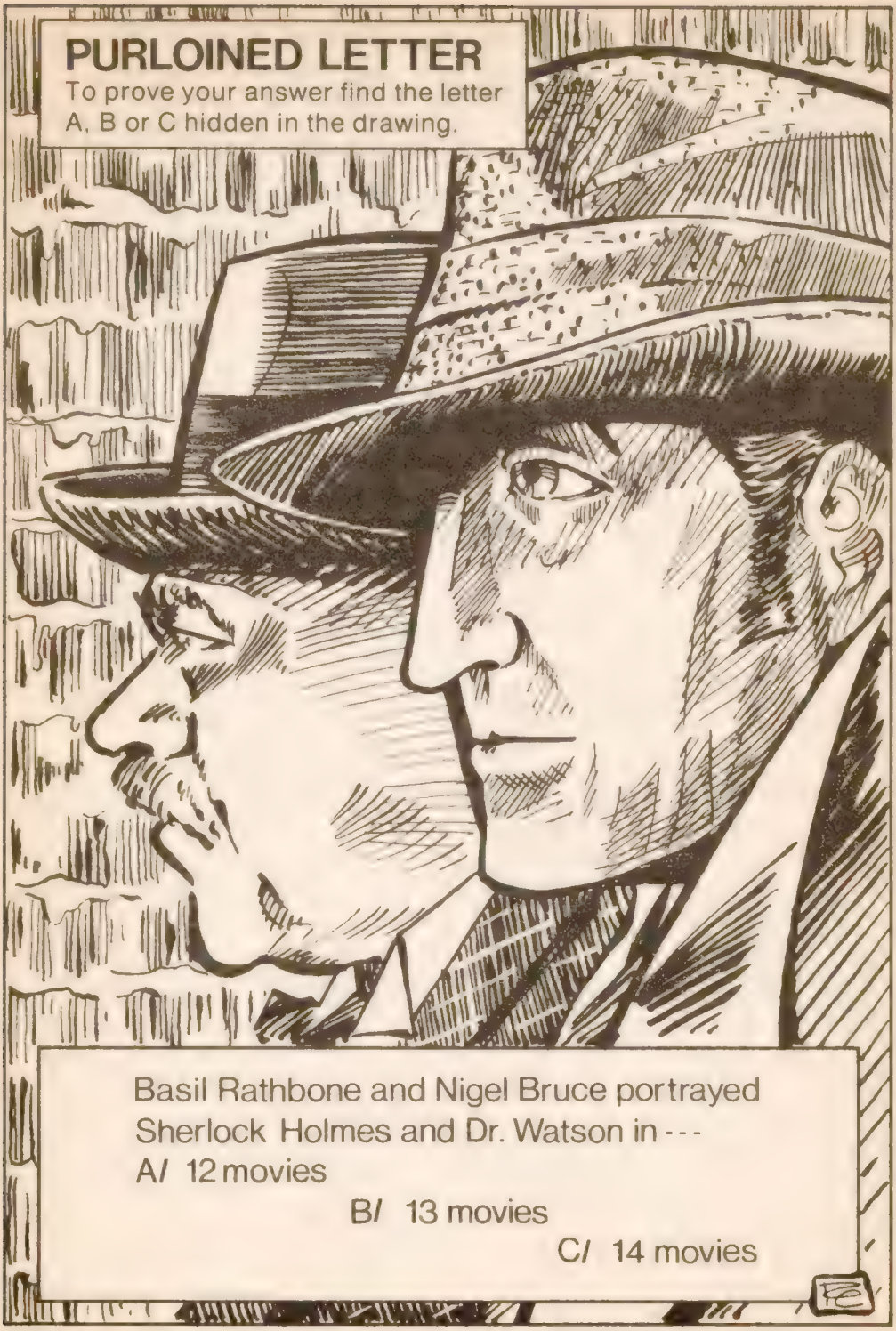
At half past one I left her alone with the wheezing beagle and drove home smiling.

WHEN I ARRIVED AT THE OFFICE THE NEXT MORNING I was still smiling. That is, until I opened my office door and saw Jan Edelman sitting behind my desk waiting for my arrival.

I glanced quickly around and saw the two overweight adjusters who worked alongside me, and a pair of unfamiliar faces.

Jan smiled broadly and invited me into my own office. "You know, Niven," she said. "It all sounded pretty good last night and the tape captured every word." She tossed a plastic-coated I.D. card across my desk towards me. "I'm not a wealthy widow, I'm an investigator from the home office. These two gentlemen," she indicated my fellow adjusters, "tipped us off earlier this year. These other two gentlemen are from the police department and I think they want to talk to you."

The only thing I could think about then was my ex-wife. Boy was she going to have a hard time collecting the alimony. ●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The room was pitch dark, but she went in anyway—and suddenly she became aware that she was not alone!

A Delicate Situation

by LANE MARSH

ANOTHER RED SUN WAS SETTING OVER THE WAREHOUSES, factories, and tenement projects of the big city's near west side. In the nearly empty squad room of the Canal Street Station, Sergeant Harry Brown leaned back in his creaking desk chair and looked at the big clock above the door. He smiled to himself: once again, his eight-hour shift had stretched itself to ten busy hours. He had closed the file on one murder and opened a half-dozen more on arson, armed robbery, and grand theft auto. It had been a full day.

Harry reached into his desk drawer and took out a malodorous salami and onion sandwich with which to refresh himself. But he hastily put it away again when he heard familiar footsteps coming down the hallway. "Detective Frost," he said jovially as a trim young woman in a grey tailored suit entered the room. "How's life in the Shorewood District?"

Cynthia smiled affectionately. She had served her probationary period as Harry's partner in the rough and violent Canal Street District. Then, having proven herself, she'd been transferred to the wealthy north side. "Shorewood is pretty tame compared to Canal Street. But I do get a difficult case once in a while. In fact I'm working on something now that I need your advice on."

Harry's chubby, middle-aged face reddened with pleasure at the implied compliment. "Tell me about it, Frostie."

CYNTHIA'S STORY BEGAN AT THE SHOREWOOD TENNIS

Club, where a bazaar had recently been held to raise money for its building fund. The day after the bazaar, Mrs. Olivia Saunders, secretary of the club, had opened the cashbox to count the receipts, estimated at $9,800.

"Estimated, you say? Wasn't she able to make an exact count?"

"No, she wasn't, Harry, because the money had been stolen during the night. Every cent."

The cashbox had been locked up securely in the office of the clubhouse, to which only two persons had the key: Mrs. Saunders and Mrs. Cassandra Haschke, the club's president. Police technicians had found no evidence of forcible entry, so, Detective Frost had concluded, the thief must have used one of those keys.

"I take it," interjected Harry, "that both the ladies in question are so wealthy that a mere $9,800 would hardly tempt them into a life of crime."

"Right again, Harry. But I have another suspect: the tennis pro."

In talking to the Tennis Club's staff and members, Cynthia had discovered that Mrs. Haschke and Steve Newby, the tennis pro, had been seen together frequently, at all hours. "She's the club president, I grant you, and he's the club's most important employee, but everyone believes that their association is more than professional. It's the club's favorite item of gossip."

"And he, I suppose, earns little enough that $9,800, tax-free, would be a strong temptation."

Cynthia Frost nodded grimly. "He has a swell apartment and a sports car. He travels a lot and owes money all over town. So I went to talk to him, hinted at my suspicions, and gave him a chance to confess."

"But . . ."

"But he insisted he was innocent. He even invited me to search his apartment if I didn't believe him."

"And so . . .?"

"So, I went to confront Mrs. Haschke."

"Is she by any chance the wife of Maxwell Haschke, the warehouse and shipping magnate? A former society deb, some twenty years younger than her husband?"

"That's right, Harry." Cynthia's voice betrayed mild surprise. "I didn't know you kept up with high society news."

"Normally I don't. But Max Haschke is an old acquaintance." Harry nodded towards the grimy, steel-reinforced window of the squadroom. "If that glass were clean enough to see through, you could look down the street to where Max Haschke began his business thirty-

odd years ago. He was a crafty old pirate, not above bending the law to get what he wanted. Though I imagine he's changed quite a bit since he put on a clean shirt and moved out to Shorewood."

"I wouldn't know, since I've never met him. But his wife is perfectly charming. And she, too, denied any affair between herself and Bruce Newby. She was shocked, in fact, to hear what the gossip was saying about her."

Harry smiled knowingly. "Naturally, she'd act that way. Her reputation is worth more to her than any $9,800."

Cynthia blushed slightly. "I believe her, Harry."

The older detective's smile faded. "Did you ask to have a look at her Tennis Club key?"

"Yes, I did. And she couldn't produce it, though she and her servants searched the house high and low."

Harry's smile returned. "Then obviously the key isn't at her place, and it isn't at Newby's either, or he wouldn't have invited you to search there." He rubbed the tip of his bulbous nose thoughtfully. "My guess is, Newby hid the stuff at the clubhouse. That way, he reduced the risk of being caught carrying it out. He can leave it there until the investigation dies down, then take it home with impunity."

"You're probably right. I should have thought of that myself," Cynthia admitted. "I just felt . . ." She shrugged her shoulders ruefully. "Mrs. Saunders gave me a key to the clubhouse, so I can make the search right now, while no one's about." She stood up energetically. "Do you want to come along and help me look?"

"Maybe I'll come later. But first I'm going to eat a snack or something." Harry grinned. "I've worked up a terrific appetite, solving your case for you."

"Same old Harry!" laughed the young woman as she left the room.

A HALF HOUR LATER, CYNTHIA WAS WALKING DOWN A dimly lit, echoing hallway in the empty Shorewood Tennis Club. She passed by doorways marked "Office," "Ladies Lockers," and "Men's Lockers," then paused before one marked "Pro Shop." She hesitated a moment, then reluctantly opened the door.

The room was pitch-dark. She let the door swing shut behind her and absently felt along the wall for a light switch. She reached high. She reached low. She reached farther away.

But instead of a switch, her fingers touched the sleeve of someone's jacket. And a large, very powerful hand gripped her wrist. "Don't move, Newby," growled a husky voice, "or I'll break your arm."

With her free hand, Cynthia reached into her purse and took out her

police-issue blackjack. "You've made a mistake," she said with more assurance than she felt. "I'm not Newby, I'm a police officer, and you'd better let go of my arm."

But the voice just laughed—low and mocking. "A lady cop? Don't kid me. You're just one of Newby's girlfriends, come panting after him." And the big hand tightened its grip on her arm.

Acting on instinct, Cynthia whirled and struck out with the blackjack. There was the dull smack of padded steel against flesh and bone. And the low voice cried out in pain.

She struck again and the big hand let go of her arm. Then she stepped away from her attacker and jerked the door open, letting in a column of feeble light from the hallway.

A large-shouldered bull of a man knelt before her, dazed and moaning. His steel-grey hair was cut short and his face was brutish but worldly-wise, like a retired boxer's. "Get on your feet," she told him, "and put your hands against the wall. I'm going to search you."

AS SHE LED HER HANDCUFFED PRISONER OUT OF THE building, Cynthia met Harry Brown just coming up to the door. "I caught this fellow red-handed," she said, "with the $9,800 and Mrs. Haschke's keys in his jacket pocket. But he won't tell me who he is."

Harry looked quizzically at the big man's bruised face. "Why it's Max Haschke!" he said with surprise. "What were you doing here?"

"None of your business, Harry," the man rasped sullenly.

But Cynthia felt she knew the answer. "He must have stolen the cash himself, knowing that we would hear the gossip about his wife and suspect Newby of the burglary. But when no arrest was forthcoming, he decided to make certain of things by planting the key and the loot in Newby's pro shop."

"Is that true, Max?" asked Harry.

"Yes it is," the big man admitted. "Whether the gossip was true or not, I didn't know. And didn't care. The mere idea of it was driving me to distraction. I wanted to disgrace Newby in Cassie's eyes and everyone else's." He laughed bitterly. "But I've only succeeded in disgracing myself, it seems."

"I'm afraid you have," said Harry Brown. Then he turned to Cynthia Frost. "Let's call for a wagon to take this gentleman to Shorewood District Station. And then maybe we can go out for a sandwich. You must be famished after all the detecting you've done today." ●

Stiff Competition

Book Reviews by JOHN BALL

If you would like to have an enjoyable house party complete with eight guests and a fine murder, it's all been arranged for you by the "Murdered House Party" game kits. The event supposedly takes place at a British manor house in 1936. The kit contains eight elegant invitations with envelopes, sealed instructions for each of four men and four women, a host's guide complete with recipes for roast beef and yorkshire pudding, a detailed plan of the mansion, full directions for staging the event, and an audiotape by a Scotland Yard inspector who starts things off by describing in detail the demise of the supposed host, Sir Roger Watersdowne.

Each guest is advised in his or her packet what to do, what to admit, and what to conceal. There's also a version that takes place on a luxury yacht.

We saw this intriguing package at Sherlock's Home, a small but delightful mystery bookshop in Long Beach. If you want to go whole hog on your party, Sherlock's Home will even arrange for a suitable butler, a cook if needed, and the Scotland Yard inspector himself to arrive on the scene and conduct the investigation. It's all carefully plotted out and full directions are included. The party kit costs $24.95. Sherlock's Home is at 5614 E. Second Street, Long Beach, CA 90803.

★★★

While on the subject of mystery bookshops, one of the best, *The Scene of the Crime,* is adding a new feature: a European tea room. It's intended as a gathering place for mystery readers, fans, authors and all others interested in the genre and the fine victorian atmosphere of the shop itself. This is the first such enterprise in the world: a tea room in a mystery bookshop. Reservations are suggested. The Scene of the Crime is at 13636 Ventura Blvd., Sherman Oaks, CA 91423. (818) 981-2583.

★★★

Elliott Roosevelt debuts as a mystery author with *Murder and the First Lady.* As the title indicates, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt is the detective who is not above using her position to get to the truth of a White House related murder. Author Roosevelt writes surprisingly well and gives some intimate glimpses of his parents as he unfolds his story. This is a very entertaining book that it is a pleasure to recommend. (St. Martin's, $12.95)

★★★

A long established pro in the ranks is Roger Ormerod. For his eighteenth crime novel he gives us something quite different. Detective Inspector Richard Patton has three days to go before retirement when the case of a missing husband, a faceless corpse, and a paroled rapist-murderer is dropped into his lap. Along with it comes a lady who may or may not play an important role in the inspector's future life. It's all well worked out, and the ending will certainly satisfy most readers. Chalk this one up as another success for the author. (Scribner's, $11.95)

★★★

The latest Alfred Hitchcock anthology is *Crime Watch.* It contains twenty-five stories taken from the files of the Hitchcock magazine and expertly edited by Kathleen Jordan. No new ground is broken here, but there is a lot of good bedtime reading with some famous names on the author list. (The Dial Press, $12.95)

★★★

Marc Lovell brings back his blushing, six-foot-seven British would-be agent in *The Only Good Apple in a Barrel of Spies.* This is purely an entertainment and as such it is a good one. A lot of professional pickpockets are involved, including an intriguing female one. Our hero

never seems to get the girl (including a striking six-foot-one charmer in a previous book), but he has a good bumbling time along the way. So does the reader. Not to be taken seriously, but lots of fun as usual. (Doubleday Crime Club, $11.95)

★★★

One of the most effective entrances into a spy novel occurs in *Wyatt and the Moresby Legacy* by David Gethin. Super agent Wyatt has been missing for some time and is presumed dead. Then at the funeral of the man who had been his superior in British Intelligence, a floral piece is delivered bearing one word: Wyatt's code name. There is plenty of action, some of it brutal, when Wyatt is finally located and persuaded to come back on the job in a pressing emergency. Add a little sex and there is something for everyone in this adventure/espionage tale, the second of the Wyatt series. Wyatt is not the renown Commander Bond, but he does very well on his own patch. (St. Martin's, $13.95)

★★★

Guy Townsend, who publishes *The Mystery Fancier,* has entered the chapbook field with a fifty-page study by Keith Newlin called *Hardboiled Burlesque: Raymond Chandler's Comic Style.* This is a specialized item for Chandler fans and collectors. The type is small and the format simple, but there is nothing else in the literature, to our knowledge, that offers the same information. (Brownstone Books, 1711 Clifty Drive, Madison, IN 47250. $4.50)

★★★

Marilyn Sharp uses her intimate knowledge of Washington (she is a Congressman's wife) in *False Face.* Involved are a group of Congressmen seized as hostages in Mexico by terrorists, two highly resourceful CIA agents, one male and one female, the Lincoln Memorial, and lots more. A good deal of suspension of disbelief is required in reading this, but some of the gimmicks are remarkably clever and the plot holds more switches than a Puritan schoolhouse. If you read the author's debut novel, *Sunflower,* you'll be glad to know that agent Richard Owen, the CIA's best, is back. Things keep moving at a rapid rate and the surprises are genuine. (St. Martin's Marek, $15.95)

★★★

The world of modern art holds center stage in Harold Q. Masur's latest Scott Jordan Novel, *The Mourning After.* There is a good deal of

information about the dealings that go on in art galleries, a nice satisfying murder, and various other matters, all of which combine to make Mr. Masur's new novel a good one. He definitely knows how to tell a story; even if art isn't your thing, the glimpses backstage are still fascinating. (St. Martin's $12.95)

★★★

An unusually interesting anthology is *The Crime of My Life* which presents favorite stories by past presidents of the Mystery Writers of America. The whole thing has been put together and edited by Brian Garfield, who is represented by a story of his own. The quality here is obviousy very high and the names a roster of who's who in mystery writing. (Walker and Co., $14.95)

★★★

PAPERBACK NOTES: There isn't room to list all the titles, but the excellent paperback series, *Walker British Mystery* is continuing on a regular and frequent basis. Since this is a uniform edition, we predict that before long many titles will be in the collectors' category. They are all $2.95 so far . . . Bantam is continuing to reprint Rex Stout and Ross MacDonald. The latest Stout titles are *Fer-de-Lance* (the first Nero Wolfe) and *Champagne for One.* MacDonald is represented by *The Blue Hammer* . . . Computer crime is the subject of an Avon original by Trevor Martin called *The Terminal Transfer.* Once again the defense establishment is threatened by a brilliant hacker . . . Robert Moss and Arnaud de Borchgrave's terrifying novel of Miami's drug culture and Caribbean revolution, *Monimbo* is now available from Pocket Books for $3.95. Action and gore fill its pages with a story too much like today's headlines . . . Penguin has another Michael Innes in paperback, *Seven Suspects,* a Sir John Appleby story. A highly literate mystery, as always, from this reliable don cum author . . . Also from Penguin is Geoffrey Household's *Rogue Justice*, the long awaited sequel to his famous *Rogue Male.* Warner Books offers Gregory McDonald's *Fletch's Moxie* which brings back his famous super-sleuth, a justly popular series . . . Lastly, Avon offers Steven Schlossstein's *Kensei,* a tale of high technology with a strong Japanese background. The author, who does spell his name with three s's, is a bona fide Japan expert with a profound knowledge of the Japanese mind. This is a long book and a fascinating one. ●

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